PZ
3
.H2845
M

FT MEADE
GenColl

L.C.

MYRA:

A NOVEL.

BY

MAMIE LAMKIN HATCHETT.

J. W. RANDOLPH & ENGLISH,
RICHMOND, VA.
1884.

PAPER. $1.00; CLOTH, $1.25.

MYRA:

A NOVEL.

BY

MAMIE LAMKIN HATCHETT.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
COPYRIGHT.
JUN 30 1884
12824
CITY OF WASHINGTON

J. W. RANDOLPH & ENGLISH,
RICHMOND, VA.
1884.

PZ3
.H2845M

Copyright, 1884,

BY

MAMIE L. HATCHETT.

Printed by
Whittet & Shepperson,
Richmond, Va.

Bound by
Randolph & English,
Richmond, Va.

TO

MY DEAR MOTHER,

THIS STORY

IS

AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED.

CONTENTS.

PAGE.

CHAPTER I.

THE BOY HERO, ... 9

CHAPTER II.

VIOLET BANK.—A HAPPY FAMILY, ... 14

CHAPTER III.

IN WHICH SEVERAL IMPORTANT CHARACTERS ARE INTRODUCED, 19

CHAPTER IV.

DOMESTIC FELICITY, ... 27

CHAPTER V.

LIONEL, ... 34

CHAPTER VI.

THE MESSRS. SIMS, ... 41

CHAPTER VII.

AN ENJOYABLE OCCASION, ... 54

CHAPTER VIII.

MYRA'S FIRST SEASON, ... 63

CHAPTER IX.

Fenland Hall, ... 75

CHAPTER X.

Country Pleasures, ... 83

CHAPTER XI.

True Heroism, ... 92

CHAPTER XII.

From the Clasp of Azrael, ... 106

CHAPTER XIII.

A Mutual Surprise, ... 116

CHAPTER XIV.

A Thrilling Narrative, ... 123

CHAPTER XV.

Lucifer, ... 142

CHAPTER XVI.

"A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing."—Florence.—An Unopened Letter.—Oscar in Trouble.—Rodolphus Wooing, ... 149

CHAPTER XVII.

Twilight's Witching Hour, ... 165

CHAPTER XVIII.

A Reconciliation, ... 167

CHAPTER XIX.

"Serpents Coil in Rose-thickets," 178

CHAPTER XX.

EAVESDROPPING, AND WHAT CAME OF IT, ... 190

CHAPTER XXI.

IVY COTTAGE.—A DREAM AND ITS SEQUEL, . . . 196

CHAPTER XXII.

A FATAL RENCOUNTER.—SAVED FROM HERSELF, . . 207

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE NEW LIFE, ... 216

CHAPTER XXIV.

A TEST OF COURAGE AND FIDELITY, ... 226

CHAPTER XXV.

A CHAPTER OF SURPRISES, ... 238

MYRA.

CHAPTER I.

THE BOY HERO.

"LOOK out for the train when you hear the whistle!" read a lively voice from the window of a flying passenger coach; "Look out for the train when you hear the whistle!" on large placards posted at intervals along the line.

"Ahem!" remarked the speaker to a fellow-passenger; "a queer place this. Instinct teaches as much in our country."

A long, shrill whistle! The locomotive gradually slackened its speed and a sonorous: "Grand Junction" reverberated through the crowded car.

The passengers gathered up their bundles, and prepared to disembark. The individual referred to, a slender, graceful and rather distinguished-looking young man, who had not yet attained his twenty-sixth birthday, lifted his young wife, a fragile invalid, the hectic bloom of whose cheek left no doubt as to her fatal malady, and carrying her in his arms, elbowed his way through the crowd, followed by a black nurse with a three-year-old child, whose baby face need only to be compared with that of the beautiful mother to determine its parentage.

It was at a grand central depot, the junction of a number of railroads, and the trains constantly coming and going kept up a perpetual hubbub and confusion. Failing to make connection, and necessarily detained here for several hours, the attentive husband, making a temporary couch of shawls, cloaks, and such articles as circumstances rendered available, laid his suffering wife tenderly upon it. Seeing her comfortably settled, he walked about the room to stretch his limbs, cramped with long sitting. To add to the noise and disorder, a circus company presently ar-

rived, with menagerie and other concomitants. Boys huzzaed, men laughed loudly and swore coarsely. The acrobats were insolent and frontless; the women flirted boldly, and swaggering inebriates thrust themselves into the ladies' reception-room.

The young man, with quickening step, paced the room restlessly, as though by that means to give vent to his displeasure and disgust. He consulted his watch from time to time, with ever and anon an anxious glance toward the motionless form on the sofa.

"Half-past twelve!" he muttered aloud; "two hours yet!" impatiently; and then to himself: "Grand Junction! Grand Junction! I have traveled a bit in my time; but of all the places, of all the crowds in which I have ever yet found myself, this is the foulest! Grand Junction!—a Babel!—a Vanity Fair! Grand Junction!" looking contemptuously about him; "a grand place, truly! a grand set of rowdies and whiskey drinkers!"

A feeble voice called: "Robert!" and the soliloquy was cut short.

He obeyed the summons with alacrity; but before he could reach her side, she was seized with a fit of coughing, so exhausting in its violence that the delicate form swayed as a leaf in the tempest. The attack was longer and more distressing than usual, and the invalid sank back upon her pillow faint and lifeless. The alarmed husband called to the nurse to fetch restoratives, who, seating the child upon a divan, hastened to his assistance. It was some minutes ere their combined efforts could revive the sufferer. They were at last rewarded, as the dark eyes opened slowly.

"Robert!" she said, scarcely above a whisper, "where is our baby?"

The father started up and ran his eyes around the apartment. In his anxiety for the wife, he had lost sight of the not less dear and only child. To his surprise and dismay, she was not in sight. He made diligent search for her among the crowd, but without success. A wild fear took possession of him, and strong man as he was, he tottered and grew dizzy with suspense and apprehension. A woman's scream arrested his attention. In a frenzy of grief and forebodings, Robert Marston rushed to the door just in time to see his lost darling snatched from the track, where in another moment she must have been a mangled corse, by a noble-

looking black-haired youth whom he had several times noticed standing apart from the promiscuous multitude.

The little fugitive, having no one to look after her, bewildered by the noise and novelty of the scene, had toddled out of the room, and attracted by the sparks emitted from the smoke-stack, had made her way directly in front of the steaming engine, where, holding out her dimpled hands to catch the bright particles, she laughed gleefully.

"Look! papa, stars! I catch 'em!" she had cried in childish ecstasy.

This outburst had drawn the attention of the by-standers, who, until then, had been too intent upon other things to notice the little runaway. Struck with consternation, they had looked on with stupid horror. One woman screamed and swooned at the sickening spectacle, and it was only the reckless daring of a brave and chivalrous lad that had saved her from a horrible death.

Vociferous shouts now break from applauding spectators; but the young hero, heedless of them all, lifts the affrighted innocent in his arms and fights his way through an admiring throng. The child, finding herself in a stranger's arms, terrified by the tumult, wails piteously and refuses to be pacified. The little nervous frame quivers with emotion, as, shrinking from the strange faces that meet her eyes on every hand, she nestles more closely to her gallant deliverer. The agonized father, with brimming eyes, extends his arms in mute gratitude; but waving him back gently, the youth pushes on, making no pause, but marching straight to the weeping mother, (anxiety and excitement having inspired her with supernatural strength) gives the priceless treasure into her frantic clasp. The parent, in hysterical sobs, finds her words to have lost, for once, their magic. The lad comes again to the rescue.

"Hush! little one;" he says soothingly; "There now, don't cry any more: don't you see how sorry it makes poor mamma? Don't cry any more, and I'll give you something pretty."

He looks about for means of redeeming this rash promise, but can find nothing attractive about the bare walls or plain furniture of the dingy room. He ransacks his pockets—a penknife, a ball of twine, a lead pencil and two fish-hooks are the result of the search. A shade of despair settles for a moment upon the

clear, broad brow. Suddenly he remembers something else. He has but one trifle about him, a singular one, and not a very suitable ornament for a boy of his age. But let not sages carp at youthful caprice; boys are singular things, school boys especially, and this one in particular. He had noticed it in a jeweler's shop; it had pleased, at the time, his fancy, which being gratified, he had scarcely given it a thought since that hour. No ordinary youth is this young Apollo: he has ever been of a romantic disposition, and feeds his vivid imagination upon dreams of high exploits in other climes, inspired by tales of adventure and books of travel, which he prefers above all other companions.

A tiny gold dagger is detached from the chain from which it depended and placed in the chubby hands.

What child so young, especially of the weaker sex, as not to distinguish words of tender pleading from those of harshness and reproof? Attracted by the bauble and the movements of the speaker, she ceases her sobs and attends to his words.

A little more coaxing, and Sir Knight feels amply repaid in seeing the distorted face of a moment before suffused with smiles, as, with *naive* expectancy, she puts up her full red lips for a kiss; that being the only way suggested to her infantile mind, by which to express her pleasure and satisfaction. A look of triumph for a moment lights up his handsome countenance, succeeded by another—not painful, but regretful—as he remarks something indescribably fascinating in the large, earnest, lustrous orbs upturned to his, their heavy fringes wet with recent tears, sparkling like rain-drops in April sunlight.

But his time is up! the moment has come when he must tear himself from those of whom he would fain know more. He has traveled with them several days, observing, though unobserved. The *distingue* air of the youthful couple, the sufferings of the wife, the anxiety of the husband and beauty of the infant daughter have touched his boyish heart, excited curiosity, and aroused his sympathy. Since accident has enabled him to render them so signal a service, he would claim his reward in knowing at least the *name* of those who have awakened within him so strange an interest; but there is no time for thought or questions. Here, it appears, they are to separate: their routes lie, perchance, in opposite directions; he, southward bound; they, he knows not whither.

The last whistle warns him that he is in danger of being left. He makes a hasty movement to retire. The father, too full to speak, presses his hand in silence; the mother, with streaming eyes, looks the thanks she cannot utter. With a final glance at the innocent author of all the trouble, nimble as a chamois, he bounds away and leaps up the platform as the train is moving off.

Those of the passengers who witnessed the occurrence cast toward him admiring glances. They are all lost on the rapt dreamer as he sits gazing pensively from his window, seeing and yet not seeing the ever shifting landscape. This day forms an epoch in his existence—he has had an adventure. He has done a noble deed, has protected the helpless and innocent, has saved a young life, and brought joy to two anguished hearts. He feels so brave and strong and buoyant in his stainless youth! His being is alive with sensations such as he has never known; his soul is astir; a childish voice, a soft, a dulcet tone echoes, like music, through his heart; while on fancy's horizon dawns a small fair face, the star of destiny! Something, an invisible something, a voiceless thing, speaks to him, changing the drift of his wild imaginings. The future spreads before him boundless, brilliant, glorious! His heart swells and throbs with noble impulses. The hours roll unheeded by, in anticipations of lofty undertakings and grand achievements, beyond which are visioned Edens with air all fragrance, sounds all music, and life all sunshine; fairy palaces, illumined by one presence, an embodiment of grace and beauty, with a voice as soft as the fall of fountains, eyes that borrow their lustre from on high, hair a plexus of golden light, cheeks that would shame a sea-shell, and lips like a coral rosebud fresh with matin dews. Such is youthful extravagance!

The laboring engine halts—his Paradise dissolves into nothingness; his castles float away in bits of airy cloud; the vision is dispelled, and dull reality jars upon his poetic soul.

CHAPTER II.

VIOLET BANK.—A HAPPY FAMILY.

IN S———, one of the eastern counties of Virginia, was situated the gay and picturesque village of B———, nestling in a pretty vale formed by a cluster of majestic hills, their emerald crowns dappled in the distance. Though having no size to boast of, its business facilities, neighboring springs, salubrious climate, and pleasing surroundings rendered it a place of some importance and of frequent resort.

See it in spring-time,—bedecked in gala gems and freshening drapery!—with its fragrant gardens, verdant meads and flowery knolls bespread with pearly daisies, golden butter-cups and myriads of feathery blossoms; the hills, with their versicolored tiara of budding beauties, fanned by ambrosial zephyrs.

See it in summer! with its sylvan shades, waving fields, blushing sunsets and restful calm.

See it in autumn,—in Nature's burial robes!—with its regal mantles of crimson and purple and gold and amber, royally beautiful in its winding-sheet; while the heavenly arch of paler azure shines alien from afar, and bracing breezes and sighing gales chant a solemn requiem.

See it in winter! clad in white and dazzling raiment, its spires and cupolas glistening in the frosty air, 'neath a gray and lowering sky.

The village proper stood upon a gentle eminence, at whose base rushed a noisy little river, never stopping to relate its mystic story, threading its way through smiling meadows, and spanned by a rustic bridge, on either side of which grew creamy laurels, gaudy honey-suckles, ferns, daffodils and water lilies, the stream embowered by tangled vines, interlacing the leafy canopy. Opulence, enterprise and intelligence characterized the inhabitants, and as the rendezvous of a wealthy and pleasure-loving community, it was often the scene of festivity.

From the river to the north sloped far-stretching fields in the

highest state of cultivation, and at the end of another half mile there suddenly rose, in abrupt contiguity with the road-side, a perpendicular steep, upon the apex of which stood a superb stone mansion, princely and imposing with its turrets, oriels, breezy verandas and ornamental balustrade. The height was gracefully rounded by three successive terraces, neither tree nor shrub being permitted to break the short, smooth sward, intermixed with tufts of modest violets; the ascent made by broad granite steps so exquisitely fitted into the green precipice as to resemble the work of nature rather than of man. The slope at the rear was more gradual, the out-buildings forming a semicircle about the declivity; the south flanked by a large garden, the pride of the aged gardener, whose only care was to trim and keep it; the north by a shady park, where the summer sunlight played at "hide and seek" among the shadows, impenetrable to the tenderer glances of bashful Luna.

The interior, in consonance with the surroundings, everywhere bespoke means and culture; the walls, hung with select paintings, softly tinted in harmony with the rich carpets, elaborate hangings and sumptuous furniture; the drawing-room especially was a marvel of taste and elegance, opening into the conservatory, whose beauteous inmates mingled their perfumed sighs, making each stirring breath a censer upon which to send their humble offerings to the heaven which bestowed them.

The father of the present owner had, in early youth, been at great trouble and expense in planning and erecting the noble pile—and a noble pile it was—for years the admiration and envy of the surrounding country. He had bequeathed it to his only surviving son with a request that he would, on no account, ever allow it to pass into other hands than those of the family; but that whatever the vicissitudes of fortune or wherever his wandering feet might tend, he would still retain his patrimony. Hence, though duty had forced him to desert it for a brief while, he had now returned to the home of his boyhood, declaring that he would never leave it more, but would die in the halls which had known his first infant breath.

Hardly a mile from B——, they enjoyed the advantages without the din and bustle of the station, and the ease and system,—so agreeable to the visitor,—that regulated the Violet Bank household,

was owing, in a great measure, to the fact that many of the servants formerly belonging to the Marston estate had never left the plantation upon which they had been born and reared, but still served their quondam owner faithfully and well. Warmly attached to "Marster," they looked to him for protection and advice with the confidence and reverence of days *ante bellum*. Among these was a venerable Ethiopian, known as "Aunt Jemima." She had nursed Mrs. Marston when an infant, had officiated as maid later, and since that lady's marriage had superintended the establishment in her absence. She now supervised the younger domestics, manifesting the liveliest interest in the remotest scion of what she termed "her family," considering herself, in fact, quite one of them.

You would hardly recognize in the stout, jocular gentleman—fleshy almost to obesity, in the prime of strength and vigor—the slender, beardless young man introduced in the opening chapter; neither in the amiable, pink-cheeked matron, the invalid wife; nor in the graceful, vivacious little maid, just merging into womanhood, the chubby three-year-old whose juvenile acquisitiveness occasioned the scene we have attempted to describe. Yet, strange as it may appear, they are the same. It has been more than ten years since that eventful day, and many and important changes have been wrought in the interval. Time has brought on its wings maturity to the one, healing to the other, development to the child. It being with the hope of restoring the sufferer that the young husband had left his beautiful home, they had visited various localities esteemed beneficial in cases of pulmonary affections, and finally, three years in the Bermudas had effected a cure, seemingly permanent.

Back among the friends and companions of his youth, blessed with health and prosperity, his treasures spared to him, his large heart overflowing with love and gratitude, the husband and father strove to make some return to a beneficent Providence in kindness and goodwill toward his fellowmen. Thackeray very aptly compares the world to a looking-glass, since it gives back to every man the reflection of his own face: "Frown at it, and it will in turn look sourly upon you; laugh at it and with it, and it is a jolly, kind companion." Robert Marston laughed with the world, and the world laughed with him. Nor was Myra, sole heir to his name and wealth, unworthy of her parentage. With the

spirit, humor and sparkling wit of the father, the winning gentleness of the mother, she was a child of whom they were at once fond and proud. If she had faults, she had virtues as well; if quick to resent, she was even quicker to forgive; and fits of anger, provided contrition follows immediately in their wake, are like sea breezes, that leave the waves more sweetly calm for the momentary agitation. To mild persuasion, facile as a willow bough; to compulsion, steel; with an innate love of truth and right and a proportionate detestation of hypocrisy; genial with those she liked, indifferent to those in whom she felt no especial interest, haughty toward those she distrusted; at times sportively gay, at others silent and meditative, she was a study. Never crossed, seldom reproved, an ordinary nature might have been spoiled; but to abuse affectionate indulgence, by allowing the native beauty of her character to be marred thereby, would have been to confess a weak brain and a shallow soul. Having few companions of her own age, she learned to enjoy the society of her elders—to feel as they felt, to think as they thought, to talk as they talked; and so rapid was her progress, and so remarkable the avidity with which she devoured multifarious knowledge, that her teachers were kept in a state of wonder as to the next talent to be discovered.

Of all the visitors who frequented the house, Lionel Harrison, a quiet, grave man, nearer her father's age than her own, was Myra's acknowledged favorite. He had been intimate with the former when at college, and their friendship had only strengthened with time. She was too young at the time of their removal to remember her former residence at Violet Bank, but he was anything but a stranger. Held in high esteem by her parents, his name had been a household word from her earliest recollection, and she had relics of toys and sundry trinkets of which he had been the donor. When presented to him on their return, he had met her with easy dignity, and if he felt pleasure, it was expressed in his face rather than in words. Without show of surprise, or even an *attempt* at a compliment (which would have been to lower himself in her estimation, and render her shy and suspicious of him) after looking at her long and earnestly, he had released her hand in the most natural way, with the brief observation: "That she was some inches taller than when he had last seen her."

He too was a study. Calm and self-collected as he seemed, you felt that he was capable of intense feeling, that his breast was the home of powerful emotions. Moral fortitude was stamped upon the high, broad brow, and the clear light of his gray eye reflected a soul as good as it was brave. An accomplished scholar, his manners pleasing and unaffected, with the kindest of hearts, though not noisily flattered, he was known and beloved in every circle. A student of the law, his mental calibre was such that he might have been eminent in his profession, but that, through modesty, or from some other cause, he appeared to shun rather than court distinction. Temperate and energetic, he might have been a rich man, had he not been too sensitive to the cries of poverty or distress, too lavish of his bounty to amass wealth. He, like his friend, was the last of his race, with the exception of his aged mother to whom Myra was much attached. Their home, in the suburbs of B——, was a pretty villa, as unpretending as themselves, and many of his leisure evenings were passed at Violet Bank, where he was received without ceremony and where a warm welcome always awaited him. Being connected by no ties of kinship and averse to the punctilious "Mr.," which would have erected between them an insurmountable barrier, it was a whim of his to have her call him simply: "Lionel." This informal address, in ignoring the difference of ages, put them on familiar footing and an unreserved confidence grew in time to exist between this oddly-matched pair. With others he was often taciturn; with her he was the most entertaining of companions. To him she confided her imaginary troubles, finding him ever attentive and sympathetic. Was there a hard lesson or a subject with which her untutored brain could not grapple, he brought order out of chaos, and in his own quiet, peculiar way pointed out new beauties, opening fresh fields to her omnivorous mind.

If Myra loved her friends and enjoyed their companionship, there were moments when she liked her own thoughts better. Given to self-communion, there were hours when she would sit apart, seeing nothing, hearing nothing, though of what she was thinking, her countenance furnished no clew. These fitful moods troubled the tender mother; the discerning father saw in them something more than word or look expressed; he recognized in them heaven's divinest gift. Would it expand, unfold itself?

Time and circumstances must decide. (There is an analogy between the intellectual and physical organizations,—between the highest and lowest orders of creation, between the animate and inanimate, between man and vegetable,—each, according to its nature, must be cultivated, exercised, burnished or refined. The gem, until polished, is lustreless; the animal must be trained to bring out its superior qualities; the tree must be pruned, nourished, ere it yields its choicest fruits; and the purer, sweeter essences of the plant are imperceptible save to those who know the secret art by which to extract them.) He beheld in them a profound nature and a thoughtful spirit, understanding beyond her years, a spark of that immortal fire which, though it might never burst to flame, was there nevertheless,—a bright though smoldering spark, and were she the daughter of some humble artisan, with no claim to position but personal merit and no means for attaining it but by her own labor, zeal and resolution, would earn for her name a place among those of Nature's favored children.

CHAPTER III.

IN WHICH SEVERAL IMPORTANT CHARACTERS ARE INTRODUCED.

THE last two years of Myra's school life were passed at Heywood Institute, a deservedly celebrated institution among the magnificent mountains of her own State, where her mother had received her education, and by whom—as with every true alumnus—its classic halls were still held in affectionate remembrance. Here the studious habits which had characterized the child won for her what she so conscientiously labored to merit—the respect and esteem of her teachers.

Among these was one for whom she felt more than regard. She was one of those brisk, bright little women with ever a kind word and loving smile for those around her,—like a ray of light, escaped from the ethereal world, to illumine with its timid beam life's murky way,—there was about her an irresistible, a magnetic charm that attracted and attached to herself all who knew her. She was at once instructress, sister, friend, or whatsoever else duty

demanded or a warm heart dictated. In a word, to know her was to love her, and "dear little Miss Ray" was the receptacle of all the hopes, doubts, and disappointments of her little circle of friends and admirers. Callous indeed the heart she could not reach; restive the spirit she could not subdue. To disobey Miss Ray was a crime; to be reproved by her, a disgrace. Even the most insurgent of her classes acknowledged and yielded to the mysterious power; they could not decline the proffered help so kindly extended; and those deemed incorrigible by others found anger and perversity dissolve beneath her smile like frozen rills in May sunshine. But for the crow-feet around the soft brown eyes, you would have taken her to be much younger than she was; and while a quiet content signalized her life, there was something so inexpressibly sad in the small Hellenic face when at rest, that you could but feel that she had been loved and appreciated in youth, and that some deep, unmitigable sorrow had driven her from a society she was so fitted to adorn, and induced her to inflict upon herself hardship and toil, in order that she might promote the happiness and success of others.

Myra often observed her in these unguarded moments, and formed many conjectures as to the nature of her affliction.

She might have been five and forty; had she been sixty, she would have been no more an "old maid" than at eighteen. No one would think of insulting that noble, unselfish woman with the opprobrious epithet; and since several of the above mentioned class are destined to figure in our story, it would be well to define the term, or rather, to give our own signification of it.

Some persons fall into the erroneous opinion, that simply because a lady has passed the stated age at which the generality of women marry, she is, of course, one of these abominable creatures, and must be snubbed and ill-treated accordingly. This is a mistake, and shows an absence of thought and feeling. Some of the purest and best characters the world has ever known were those who lived a life celibacy, and because they had no other claims upon their time and attention, had a better opportunity for administering to the comfort and advancement of others. If a woman, for some reason best known to herself, chooses to go through life alone, if she thinks thus to accomplish some higher, nobler end, it is nobody's affair but her own. It concerns no one

but herself, and the world should accept the fact and be satisfied; it has no right to stare at or ridicule her.

What *I* understand by an "old maid," is a person who very much resembles a certain animal of the feline species, her claws incased in velvet, ready, upon the slightest provocation, to turn and rend you. Nor is she confined to the female sex alone—far from it; neither has age aught to do with the character; married or single, she is the same at ten or eighty. She is blessed with an insatiable curiosity, and possesses the tact for insinuating herself into the confidence of all with whom she is thrown; like Proteus, she has the power of adjusting her outward semblance to circumstances, but is wise—only in her own conceit—and less cautious in her predictions. She feeds on slander, and greater the calumny, more dainty the morsel. If she is capable of affection, it is lavished on a cat or lap-dog, and she has a mania for storing away and guarding with jealous care all the odds and ends that chance to fall in her way, her attention being turned to the minor interests of life while higher achievements are left unattempted. Brainless and soulless herself, she would bring others to her level; and though, through fear, courteously treated, is regarded with secret horror and distrust by her neighbors. And her innocent victims! where are they? The weaker spirits faint, languish, die! (and those who kill by slow torture are no less murderers than the malignant assassin) others, like the grass of the Ganges, must be trampled upon to draw forth the more pungent spices of the soul. Such an one rises superior to his foe. To him, each pitiless dart is a potent elixir, transmuting to gold the baser metals of his nature; it buoys rather than depresses, inflames rather than extinguishes. Something urges him on—it comes in the stillness of midnight, speaks in the undulations of silence: "To him that overcometh will I give a crown—not of laurels (perishable), but of light (immortal)." His brain whirls, his pulses beat quick and warm, his heart swells and ebbs like the frothing waves of a tempestuous sea—outwardly calm, the conflict within is maddening! Crushed, bruised, mangled! in a transport of contending emotions, he raises his bleeding form, distends his trailing wings, and, with conscience for his Mentor, virtue for his shield—like the eagle—soars aloft, leaving the cringing little hawk to its petty prey. He has fought a good fight, has gained a noble victory,

who from star-lit heights can smile down upon the offender and conscientiously say: "My enemy! I thank you, for you have made me what I am."

For those who slay in anger or resentment there is a punishment; but these more than murderers! who shall pronounce their doom? These deadliest adversaries (save one, whose servants they are) of the human race! who can too loudly condemn them?

All cowardly, weak-minded men come under this caption—such as never miss an opportunity for doing their fellow an ill turn when sure of escaping detection, and who, if charged with a fault, too timorous either to confess or resent it, stick their fists in their eyes and blubber, like the great babies that they are. They should be rigged in skirts and aprons, and made to "wing the tedious-wasting day" in the intellectual pastime of making pastry or bed quilts as the most certain way of keeping them out of mischief. If a majority of mankind would spend only half the time in self-elevation that they devote to aspersing others, what an Eden our earth would be!

So much for the "old maid." And now to our story.

We were speaking of Miss Ray. Myra had always felt a peculiar interest in and sympathy for her, but it was not until her last term that their mutual liking had ripened into a warm and fast friendship. It was not until she had been prostrated by a severe, though short illness (at a time when, her mother being herself quite sick, they had kept it from her, fearing to cause her unnecessary alarm), through which she had watched her so unwearyingly and nursed her so tenderly, that, from that time, each had been to the other doubly dear.

With the girls she was universally popular. (A young lady with an ancestry and a rich father would hardly be else at a fashionable boarding-school. Her two room-mates, Henrietta Bryant and Florence Stillbury, she fondly loved; and if others thought her proud or indifferent, it was excusable in one of her age and position.) A favorite with the masters, courted by the pupils, Myra believed her happiness as nearly perfect as it could be away from the dear ones at home.

They were a charming and interesting coterie, these three friends. Henrietta, like Myra, Virginian in blood and birth—and a loyal daughter—with hair like the raven's wiug, laughing black

eyes and cheeks whose bloom vied with the rose; artless as a child, merry as the day, the ringleader in mischief and admiration of her band, who looked upon her as a miracle of wit and good-nature. Florence, Kentucky born, fair and sylph-like; and while it was confidentially whispered that her sole fortune was the beauty of which nature had been unsparing, her father being only a struggling merchant in Lexington (her home), the extravagance of her dress and the number and costliness of the presents she was constantly making her bosom friends (of whom she had, in the school, not to mention those elsewhere, not less than a dozen, although she assured Myra that she loved "her little chum" better than all the rest together) seemed to contradict the insinuation. Myra, something between; "a happy medium," as the former insisted. Her features delicate and regular, if not so striking as those of her companions, her physiognomy showed more character than either. A wealth of glossy chestnut curls rippled over a smooth, fair brow, beneath which beamed eyes of deepest hazel, whose heavy fringes swept cheeks that would have been pale but for the flitting color that came and went with excitement or emotion, and when the coral lips parted in a smile, they revealed teeth lovelier still, her face sparkling with mischief and dimpling with sweetness.

Strange that we should choose for our intimates (not only in school days, but in after life) those dissimilar in person and disposition. And not strange either, since,—contrary creatures that we are!—owing to this longing for the unattainable, we are apt to admire those totally unlike ourselves. It was wonderful, the concord of these contrasting spirits. No partiality was allowed between them, and was there an unkind thought or a jealous twinge, it was unsuspected, being pent in the breast in which it rankled; like parts in music, each according tone made the diapason grander.

But Myra, favored as she was, was often left companionless—Henrietta and her confederates busy in projecting or executing some harmless prank, and Florence, to preserve her popularity, being compelled to devote much of her time to her numberless "friends." Deprived of the society of her comrades, she preferred solitude. There was in the grounds an artificial lake near which grew a gnarled and giant oak, its mossy roots forming a

rustic divan and ever with her a favorite nook. An ardent worshipper of Nature, she loved her best in her serenest moods; and on Saturdays and fine days, exercises over, armed with sketch-book and pencil, she would pass beneath its shade many of her leisure hours. But I am afraid her mind was not always upon her sketch-book. She would sometimes fall into a profound and all-absorbing reverie, her chain of thought unbroken by the tranquil waters at her feet, until, gliding unconsciously down its magic stream, an ideal future, in which every other vision concentered in one, would open upon her.

"What vision?" you ask. A very ill-defined, very shadowy vision; but one most pleasing to herself. It is a tall, graceful figure that stands before her, "hero" traced in every lineament; the voice, though deep, is remarkably musical, and it is in accents of tenderness that he addresses her. For an instant she sees him as plainly as did Prince Habib the beautiful Dorathil-goase when she descended upon him in his sequestered vale. She raises her eyes to get a better view; the spell is broken; the form vanishes.

Half-formed conjectures of this unknown hero at this period often occupied her mind. They recalled an event which, looking back through twelve eventful years, seemed to mark the beginning of her existence. She had no remembrance of anything prior to it, and so faint, so confused, was the impression left upon her infantine memory, that she was puzzled to know whether she recollected or imagined it. In moments like these there ever awoke within her an ineffable admiration for the young Hercules who had so nobly thrust his own life between her and eternity and stayed the hand of the destroying angel. How rare and grand a thing was true bravery! and how she longed to thank him in person for the life service he had rendered her! It sounded like a delightful fairy tale of which she never tired. There was a fascination in the very mystery which enveloped it; she was sure it was the opening of some enchanting romance of which time would write the *denouement*. She believed that they would some day meet, and resolved to keep the little souvenir as a sign of recognition between them.

Ah, yes! I see that curling lip and elevated brow. I hear distinctly the words, "Maudlin! Quixotic!" I see you quite plainly, reader. (I trust you are not an "old maid!") If you chance to

be an imaginative young miss, you will think, doubtless, that *you* would like to be the heroine of a novel. Well! you might be, every life is a romance if the truth were known. If a schoolboy, you will laugh scornfully, with the comment: "What silly things these girls are!" If a discreet "mamma," you will unconsciously throw a loving and somewhat anxious glance toward your own Ada or Gertrude, and hope in your heart that *your* girls will be sensible and not romantic. But, oh! there is grandma,—dear, good, wise, patient, prim prudent grandma!—her white forehead is wrinkled with something very like a frown as she looks suspiciously at Jennie, who has just celebrated her fifteenth natal day, and who is never allowed to sleep under an open window or damp her slippers with the evening dew, lest the "dear child" should catch cold. She sits just now demurely at her side, and suffers herself to be instructed in certain obsolete embroidery stitches, not that she cares anything about learning the stitches, but fears to hurt grandma's feelings. Yes; grandma reads disapprovingly. She adjusts her cap, pushes up her spectacles, and looks askance at Jennie. She (grandma) is sure that the miasma about all still water would bring on fever and a number of dreadful diseases, and sincerely trusts that "her child" will never be guilty of anything so imprudent. Then there is the cynical bachelor, whose life some youthful "disappointment" has embittered, and who, in consequence, pronounces all women "shallow, whimsical, and deceitful." And again, the harassed and phlegmatic business man (if such deign to peruse our simple story) in whose disposition worldly cares and conjugal infelicity have left no trace of sentimentality, thinks this, I dare say, excessively juvenile, is *quite* disgusted.

My lofty, carping friend, despise her not. Cupid has a shaft for all.

Myra was ambitious in those days; no task was too long, no subject too abstruse. One calm, cloudless afternoon, when she had been for some time in her accustomed retreat, absorbed in thought, the sketch-book was finally laid aside. White, glassy pebbles lay thick around her. She commenced picking them up mechanically one by one, and casting them into the smooth lakelet, watched them dreamily. Each created a gentle ripple, and the little wave, thus put in motion, continued to undulate, in-

creasing in size and force with each successive curl until broken by the opposite shore.

"So with our words and deeds," she mused, "except that in eternity there are no obstructing brinks."

The bare utterance of this one sentence gave birth to a thousand wild, inexpressible longings. Her soul kindled, her cheeks aglow, brilliant but imperfect ideas set her brain in strange commotion. Pressing her hand against her heart, as was her wont when agitated: "Oh! that I might one day accomplish something great and noble!" was her thought. "Would that I might cast at least one pebble into the 'shoreless ocean,' where the tiny wave might flow on and on, a living monument to my memory!"

Myra! Myra! foster not that viper, Ambition. Aspire to be good, but never to be great.

Her home letters were but slightly varied in matter or diction—loving regrets at her absence, how they longed for her return, a few news items, after which, a page or two of mild but salutary advice. The closing paragraph might run perhaps as follows:

"Lionel was over last evening (he always enquires after you) and sends love."

The term was nearing its close when one of these semi-weekly billets brought from her mother the following:

"We have a new neighbor at Cedar Grove: The family, consisting of a man, his wife and two sons; namely, Rodolphus and Henry, arrived about a week since. Their cognomen is 'Sims.' They are Canadians I think, and reputed to be immensely wealthy, although, for my part, I entertain doubts as to whether the old gentleman is such a 'Croesus' as Madam Rumor would have us believe. It is gratifying, however, to see the windows open and signs of life about the place once more, it having been without an occupant since the death of old Mr. Thomson, last autumn. *I* have seen them only once, but the servants bring amusing reports of 'them furriners'. Your father and I called yesterday; they are rather singular, but being so near, hope, upon further acquaintance, they may prove agreeable."

CHAPTER IV.

DOMESTIC FELICITY.

IT was a sultry June morning; the much dreaded examination, that formidable river of Test, was at last got over; the long anticipated commencement was a thing of the past; regretful farewells had been wrung from tender hearts; Heywood was behind, the world before her. A nervous lassitude had succeeded the late excitement, and the emancipated student, wedged in between her mother on the one hand and her "parcels" on the other, found the suffocating air of the close car particularly oppressive and enervating. The incessant monotonous noise of the flying locomotive rendering conversation tiresome, after several unsatisfactory attempts, she left off talking altogether and allowed herself to be preyed upon by a variety of emotions.

She was delighted at the idea of going home, yet as her thoughts went back to the scenes she had so lately quitted, when she remembered those who had grown to be so near to her and to whom she had bid farewell, perhaps for ever, she fell into a moralizing mood, and began to consider that there was no happiness so perfect that it must not be purchased with a pang and that the sweets of life must be tinctured with the bitter.

But sad as these reflections made her, it is not in youth to be long depressed. There is something exhilarating in the bare consciousness of existence, something inspiriting in the realization that we are about to enter the "universal theatre," to take our feeble parts in the great drama, to cast our tickets in the delusive lottery with the blissful uncertainty as to what, in the final distribution, our recompense will be. The pain of being separated from her chums was partially assuaged by the prospect of a near meeting. She had never known a sister's love, but she believed herself held by these two as such and gave in return a sister's due—the sincere abiding affection of an intense nature—an affection that scorned doubt and could overlook every fault in its object. Her parents were prepared to like those of whom they had had such flattering representations, and seconded her petitions for an early visit.

Florence had signified her intention of not returning home before the winter, having friends and relatives in the state whom she proposed honoring with her company during the summer and autumn. She promised to visit Violet Bank in the interval, and with this, and repeated and solemn assurances of a frequent correspondence and similar pledges from Henrietta, Myra was forced to be content.

Pleasant reminiscences and bright anticipations filled her mind, until her attention being called to the beauty of the region though which they were passing, admiration took precedence of every other feeling and held her as in a spell while her artist eyes feasted upon the boundless cosmorama before her. Mountains, valleys, hills and meadows chased each other in hot pursuit; yonder stretched a distant chain, its purple peaks bathed in heaven's blue; there a limpid stream, leveling in its way every barrier, sweeping impetuously onward down, down to its mother ocean, there to lose itself in her caressing arms. Pretty cottages dotted the mountain side; broad wheat fields, ripe for the early harvest, spread like a gilded plain below; here a modest rivulet and browsing flocks feeding lazily upon the grassy slope.

It was late in the afternoon when they reached B——, where they found the family carriage in waiting.

"Where is Lionel, mother?" asked the daughter when they were seated.

"Absent, dear, on business."

"And when will he return?"

"Not for several days, I think probably a week."

"Then he will not be at my party;" said Myra, in tones of disappointment.

"No. He left many regrets; was very sorry that he could not attend, but the matter was urgent."

"Business! business!" repeated her questioner with affected petulance; "the bugbear! I think he might have postponed that all important 'business'—whatever it may chance to be—in honor of so auspicious an occasion as the present. Home will hardly seem such without his familiar face."

"He will lose no time in riding over on his return, I am sure," observed the mother apologetically, "He is very fond of you, my child."

"And the fondness is mutual," was the frank rejoinder. "He is decidedly more to my taste than any young fop of my acquaintance."

"Lionel is a noble fellow;" remarked the father, catching the drift of their conversation as he approached with more bundles than he could conveniently carry. I have known him since we were boys together, and I can't mention another who could show so fair a record. He has been more than a brother to me:" he added warmly.

The road was hard and smooth: the fast trotters at the loosening of the rein sped down the sandy drive with incredible speed, and before they were fairly settled in their seats, Violet Bank came in view as gasping Day reclined her hectic cheek upon the breast of Eve, and illumined by the ruddy glow, Myra thought that she had never seen it look half so beautiful.

"My dear old home!" she cried rapturously, "can it be that I indeed behold your verdant steep once more!"

Aunt Jemima met the dusty travellers with a hearty welcome.

"Well! I declar!" exclaimed the venerable *femme de chambre* in an ecstasy of pleasure and admiration: "And so I s'pose yawl raly has got back home at last all safe and sound. I was oneasy all de time you was gone. I never did like these here ingines much nohow, and you hears of so many coliseums and sich like now-a-days. And you raly is done fotch Miss Myra home sure nough! Lord, bless my young mistis. How does you do, honey? Shake hands wid de ole nigger, and tell her howdy. Lord! Lord! jest to think that you's done come home for good! and you's done got so pretty too! Great gracious, chile! if you aint jest as presackly like your ma! and you know I always did say dat she was the lovliest 'oman as ever set foot in this here country."

Myra, touched by the honest outpourings of a sincere though simple heart, returned the greeting with kindness and good humor. "Thank you, Aunt Jemima; I am very well, and more pleased to return than you are to have me. But you must not flatter me; you remember I never liked it. It is needless to inquire after your health—you look as young and active as when I last saw you."

"Lord! Lord!" ejaculated the old woman, too much overcome to find vent for her feelings in other than her favorite interjection.

Having divested themselves of their traveling apparel, they were ushered into the supper room where the evening meal was spread with the delicacies of the season; and although Aunt Jemima insisted that the bread "hadn't riz nigh as well as usual," Myra declared that she had not seen any thing like it since she left Violet Bank.

A prettier domestic scene could hardly be imagined—the very picture, as it was, of home happiness. After a ten months' separation, each had so much to say that neither knew exactly where to begin. Mr. Marston entertained them meanwhile with puns and witicisms, which evoked from the daughter a clear ringing laugh, in comparison with which, the finest composition of Beethoven would have sounded harsh and discordant to the fond ears that drank its melody.

"Well! Pet," (his most endearing sobriquet) he said at length, "I suppose 'mother'" (he had a habit of speaking of his wife as "mother" when addressing his child) "wrote you of our new neighbors?"

"Yes, sir;—that is, she mentioned the fact without going into particulars. Pray! who and what are they?"

"Ah! you are too hard for me," with a comical expression. "Characters in their way—unique. The boys (I know little of the elders) are endowed with wonderful memories, attach great importance to pedigree and have a way of informing themselves upon the standing, both socially and financially, of every one whose name they hear mentioned. They have not been in the county a month, and I venture to say that there is not a man of prominence in S—— whose lineage they could not trace, besides giving the exact figures of his last year's tax account."

Myra smiled, and expressed a curiosity to see so remarkable a family.

Pleading fatigue, she retired early—at least, went to her room with that intention. Aunt Jemima, unable longer to restrain herself and thirsting for a bit of gossip, soon followed.

"And so, mistis, I s'pose you raly has come home to stay! And just to think that I, as nursed your ma, should ever live to see you a growd up young lady! It does seem too funny, I declar!"

"Yes, Aunt Jemima; it is really true; I have certainly come

home for good. Don't you think I am old enough to make my debut?"—mischievously.

"What 's dat you ax me? 'Don't I think you is ole enough to have a beau?' Well! I knows one thing—ole enough or not ole enough, you is guine to have 'em, and a plenty of 'em, too."

Myra, thinking an explanation would consume time, made none, and the old domestic rattled on:

"How glad all de young gentmen will be to see you turned out—to be sure; enough of 'em 's been inquiring about you—axin' me when you was comin home, and all dat. But, lor! mistis; we has got some of de curisis folks ober here at Cedar Grove as eber I come across in all my born days. I heard marster tellin' you about 'em at supper, and dey does beat all for tryin' to find out what every body has got of any folks as ever I see. One of dem young ones (I done forgot his name—Rodolphin, or somethin' like dat) come by my house 'tother day and axed me who dis place belonged to. 'Why! to marster, to be sure,' says I; 'who else did you s'pose it belonged to?'

"'Oh! yes,' says he, kinder hesitatin; 'I know it belongs to him now, but aint he got a daughter?'

"'To be sure!' says I; 'Miss Myra, and about as likely a young lady as you eber set eyes on, too."

"'Well!' says he; 'won't it belong to her when de ole man dies?'

"'To be sure!' says I; 'but look here, stranger, I dono nothin' about you; but I want you to remember dat my young mistis is a *lady*, and she aint after wantin her father to die jest for her to get his property; *our* folks is above dat.'

"He looked sort o' confused when I said dat, and I don't speck he liked it much, 'cause he rid off kind o' consulted like and ain't had nothin' to say to me since. I don't care ef he didn't; 'twont no matter fur him. I hates to jaw white folks, mistis; 'cause I know it shows a want of sense and low breedin' besides; but ef I *is* colored, I know I knows a gentman when I sees him, and I neber did have no opinion of him. You don't hear of none of *our* young men going about and talkin' dat kind o' way."

Myra replied that, as she had never seen the gentleman under discussion, she was not competent to express an opinion.

Aunt Jemima was by no means an exception to her sex, and,

like the more enlightened of her kind, possessed that characteristic "tongue" which sometimes proved rather an unruly member—especially when the reputation of "her family" was in any way at stake. Not noticing therefore, that her "young mistis's" eyes were heavy, and that her garrulous recital was met only by monosyllabic replies, she proceeded with the subject in hand, regardless of the inattention of her auditor.

"Now, thar's Mars' Lionel—jest as different as can be. Thar never was a nicer gentman ever breathed than he is, jest like I tells your ma constant. He thinks jest as much of a man whar couldn't raise a red cent as he does of one what is sot all over in diamonds, and more too, I believe. He is always a-givin' some poor body somethin', and you don't never hear a word about it from him, you may be sure. The fact is, he always looks like he is real shame ef any body happens to find it out; but then, he is a real Christian, and 's got good blood in his veins," she added emphatically. "He is over here nigh about half his time, and I jest believe he is after gettin' in de family. I certain'y would like to see you married and settled down for life wid sich a man as he is," slyly.

The very drowsy young lady to whom this panegyric was addressed and the object of these laudably good wishes, now actually screamed with laughter. "Why! Aunt Jemima; what an absurd speech! and from one of your age too. I thought that you said you were glad to have me back; it looks like it, when you are scheming to get rid of me before I have been at home a day. Surely you would not have me married before I am well out of short dresses. I had given you credit for better judgment; I have higher ambitions than matrimony. And Lionel, wouldn't he laugh if he could only guess how you were plotting against his peace! Why, he is old enough for my father; I always did think the world of him and look upon him exactly as I would upon a good, kind brother."

"Ah! yes, mistis;" with a solemn shake of the woolly head, "I knows all dat, and done hear young folks talk dat same way afore now. It sounds mighty nice to talk about bein' 'brothers,' and all dat, but 'taint nothin' in it, den. You may laugh, mistis, but I tell you it 's *so*. I aint after getin' rid of you—jest de contrary. 'Twould be jest de same as bein' at home, and so convenient every

way—so close by, you know. As for his bein' ole, dat needn't to make no diff'rence, jest so de man 's all right; and 'taint no use to hurry; it 's plenty time yet. Thar's Mars' Lionel; he laughs too; but lor! he can't fool me, 'cause I's been aknowin' all de tricks too long. He was over here 'tother day, and I says to him—says I: 'Look here, marster; it 'pears to me like as how you 's got a mighty hankerin' over dis way; I jest believe as how you 's after my young mistis.'

"He laughed too jest like you did—and looked like he was jest as much s'prised as ef he never had thought of sich a thing afore in all his born days.

"'Why, Aunt Jemima,' says he, kinder o' startin' like; 'I'm sprised at you. What could ever have put sich a thing as that into your head? and I don't see how you can say that I come to see Myra when she is not even at home.'

"'Ah! yes,' says I; 'you may laugh, marster, but you can't fool me. I's a mighty ole nigger, you know, and 's lived in dis world a long time. Dis aint de fust time I ever heard of sich a thing as 'feedin' de ole hen to ketch de chicken.'

"'But,' says he; 'Aunt Jemima, she never would look at sich an ole man as I am. Don't you see how gray I'm gettin? Why, I'm ole enough for her father.'

"'Oh! yes, marster; I knows all dat,' says I, kind o' laughin, 'but dat needn't to make no diff'rence. Gray hairs is honorable, you know; and talk about bein' ole—why! you are jest in de prime of life. Besides, I aint never heard tell of nobody yet what was too ole to get married. 'Don't you ricollect,' says I, 'hearin marster tell about dat ole 'oman what he seen at de Saratogy Springs last summer whar had jest got married and kep' goin' about tellin' all de young ladies she seed: 'Never despair, girls, never despair; I never had an offer till I was eighty, and you see I'm married now.' 'Don't you ricollect it?' says I."

Her well-meant pleasantry having ceased to amuse, reminded by several suggestive yawns that she was keeping the "blessed chile" up, and suddenly remembering that she must be tired after riding all day on "them dreadful cars," with many blessings and a hearty "good night," the old woman shuffled out of the apartment, leaving Myra to her own thoughts and the blissful oblivion of slumber.

CHAPTER V.

LIONEL.

MYRA'S debut was truly flattering. The event was celebrated the evening after her arrival in one of those princely entertainments for which the Marstons had been famous for generations back, and at which, being the daughter of the house and latest novelty, she was of course the chief attraction. Busy receiving and returning subsequent calls, she was left little time for self-communion, yet such moments she would and did find.

In the centre of the garden was a grassy mound with no other ornamentation than its own verdure. On its summit grew a solitary willow (and as it stood there, year after year, and watched its gay companions ope their tender hearts to the languishing breath of spring, beguiled into blossom by summer showers, nipped and blighted by November's trenchant blast, it bent lower its drooping boughs and wept over the vanity and evanescence of all earthly beauty).

Myra had long since appropriated this umbrageous retreat; it had ever been a favorite haunt, and here she would repair at eventide with her guitar, to sing her own simple ballads, or drink the dulcet warblings of the feathered orchestra as they chanted their parting vespers. Here she would retire within herself, muse and dream!

Then there were trunks to unpack, books to sort and arrange and paintings to be hung, some from her own dexterous brush, with others smaller and less artistic; and while the latter suffered greatly by comparison, they were, by her, held infinitely more dear from the fact of their having been given on the eve of separation by her class-mates as tokens of affection and pledges of undying friendship. Her thoughts often reverted to the old Institute and the kind instructors who were held in such fond remembrance. She formed many good resolutions, and devised many plans for future improvement. They had planted the germ; should it grow and flourish, or perish in its infancy? She play-

fully styled her Alma Mater: "Minerva," and identified knowledge with the shield of Perseus, which, if prudently and skillfully handled, would enable its happy possessor to overcome all things.

On the first Sabbath after her return, she had, at church, the gratification of beholding the much-talked-of Simses; but the pew occupied by the new comers being in rear of their own, she was unable to gain much information concerning them except that Madam's ample figure was tightly incased in the heaviest of brocaded velvets, and the red puffy face set off by a gay bonnet richly ornamented with plumes and buckles. Taking into consideration the temperature and occasion, this *bizarre* robe, together with the lavish display of chains and flowers, rendered her appearance sadly out of season, and ludicrous in the extreme. The young gentlemen were of the same type; large, florid, sandy haired and blear-eyed; this much a sweeping glance on entering sufficed to show. Custom and breeding deprived her of ocular proof, but she felt instinctively that their eyes were upon her and watched her movements curiously. She could distinguish their thick, sonorous voices above the rest of the congregation, and—it being communion Sunday—she noticed that one of the sons accompanied his mother to the consecrated board, while the other remained in his seat with the old gentleman, which august personage went through his devotions in a business way, as though religion were, with him, quite an every-day affair. * * * *

Myra was at the piano one morning, running over the airs of some new songs, when her eyes were suddenly covered by a pair of masculine hands, and a laughing voice said: "What an outrage you are committing against the laws of songsters! Nightingales do not sing at noonday."

She screamed, and extricating herself, jumped up exclaiming: "Oh, Lionel! how you did frighten me! I have a great mind to say that I am not glad to see you one bit, just to avenge myself for your abrupt entrance."

"And suppose you did," said he, smilingly; "I should not care, feeling too thoroughly convinced of the contrary. And besides, eligible young gentlemen are not such an exuberant growth about the sandy hills of B—— as to render it either expedient or politic for a young lady just entering upon the field of conquest

to trample upon the rare, although obnoxious weed, the first time she discovers one hanging about her path. She would display far better tactics did she cull the unsightly exotic and declare it an ornament to her drawing-room, even though it were a little bruised and slightly touched by autumnal frosts."

"Spoken like a sage, *alias* 'Lionel Harrison, Attorney at Law,'" cried his companion with a ringing laugh. "How is it when the 'obnoxious weed' doesn't wait to be culled, but creeps into the front parlor uninvited, without so much as a: 'Pray, permit me?'"

"Unannounced, but not uninvited," drawing her to a seat and scanning her features narrowly; "I met your mother as I was coming up the terrace; and she told me that you were within. I thought I would steal upon you and see what you were doing."

There was no mistaking that look, yet she met his earnest gaze coolly and replied: "Which was unfair."

"From which I am to infer that you are not glad to see me. Give the word and I'll decamp."

"Fishing for a compliment! Well, well! I thought you were above such."

"My angling is not very successful, it seems."

"As results prove."

"But you *are* glad?" anxiously.

"Why, of course I am. Did you apprehend that I was not? Not on the grounds you suggest though, as I do not aspire to the dignity of a young lady; for while I can play the rŏle for a time, whenever occasion requires, yet, when I find myself back at my dear old home again, I am as much a child as ever and expect to remain so for some years yet. I have missed you dreadfully ever since my return; it seemed all the while as though some one were missing."

"What! not lonesome?"

"Indeed; no!"

"Why do you say 'indeed?' Perhaps it has been too much the reverse."

"Oh, no; although B—— seems like Paris in miniature after the monotony of school life. I like excitement, and I like quiet also; I like variety; I prefer a little of both."

"And under no circumstances are you likely to forget old friends?"

"Not I. I have a decided veneration for 'Auld Lang Syne.'"

Lionel smiled his own peculiar half-sad, but beautiful smile. Myra did not notice it. He said simply: "That's right. I hope you will always think and feel as you now do."

Nothing would do but that she must stand up and allow her measure to be taken, ascertaining thereby her precise accession of height during what he termed "her late incarceration." The result seemed to have proved satisfactory, as, stepping a short distance off, he took an admiring survey of the girlish figure before him and said reflectively: "Five feet, three. Very pretty altitude, Miss Marston." His voice took a graver inflection as he added musingly: "*Tempus fugit!* How true! What an old man I must be, certainly! Just to think that I was a grown man when you were a baby! It seems but yesterday, and yet you stand before me to-day—a woman!"

Myra's light laugh recalled him. "Do hush; you will make me blue and spoil my whole day's pleasure. Why brood over the inevitable? Stop croaking about your age; you can't help it, you know, and so it is worse than folly to distress yourself about it. Besides, I don't see that you have any right to complain; we judge of age only by comparison, and it is not your fault that you were made to begin your career at a period anterior to that of some one else. We have *but one youth*, and it matters very little when that is. You are not exactly a Methuselah yet, and don't look a bit old, I assure you. Old Time, you remember, is a strictly impartial donor, and bequeaths to one and all a legacy of years."

A grateful look answered her. He understood the drift of her remark, appreciated the reproof, and thanked her for it.

"I am done," he hastened to reply; "I acknowledge that I was selfish and ungrateful; but you shall never have cause to scold me again for a similar offense. I cannot suppress a shade of sadness when I compare my face with—yours, for instance; but I have everything to make me happy just now, and nothing to render me otherwise. I would not make you 'blue' for any consideration, certainly not to-day, when I haven't seen you before for so long a time. You will very justly pronounce my society 'prosy,' and be better without than with it unless I prove myself a more enlivening companion; so I intend to set aside my 'croak-

ings,' and play 'good boy' for the balance of the day; not a syllable of complaint shall cross my lips."

Myra's sympathetic spirits rose and fell with the other's humor. His words had cast a damper upon her artless gayety. Lionel observed it.

"Come! you must exchange that melancholy countenance for one a little brighter and more animated, please, else I shall consider my visit a failure and be sorry that I came at all. Sing for me," in a lighter tone; "I enjoy no one's music so much."

"'Nightingales do not sing at noonday,'" wickedly.

"But mocking-birds do."

"Oh, man! thy name is inconsistency. I don't want to sing,—at least, not just yet; I want to talk. You haven't answered my questions."

"I was not aware that you had asked any."

"Haven't I? I intended to. You frightened them all away."

"I am on the stand; proceed."

"When did you get home?"

"Last night; and as mother was anxious to hear the result of my trip, we did not retire until an unusually late hour. This must be my apology, should you find me uncommonly stupid."

"How is your mother?"

"Quite well; and by the way, she sent love and says that you must run over and sit with her whenever you are at a loss for more agreeable company. I had not mentioned it before: first, because it had entirely escaped my memory; and secondly, I deemed it 'vain repetition' to recite a prologue always understood in the female drama. Anything else?"

"Nothing important."

"Now for the song."

"What shall it be?"

"Anything."

"Then I am forced to decline, for the reason that I do not know the piece to which you allude. I never heard it in my life and was not even aware that a song bearing that title had ever been published. Is it operatic, comic or sentimental?"

"Oh, woman! thy name is perversity," imitating her tone and expression. "Sing not any *thing*, but any *song* you like. I do not know what style suits your voice best, and am not conversant

with the names of the popular airs of the present day. I am passionately fond of music, as you well know, and am not so proficient that you need entertain fears of criticism; so you may make your own selection, feeling assured of an appreciative, if not an enthusiastic listener."

She was gifted with a voice of rare compass, and its native sweetness and thorough training rendered her a vocalist seldom surpassed. She poured her whole soul into the melody; one moment full and clear; the next, and it had sunk to a soft, pathetic cadence, and died away like a poet's dream in a scarcely audible whisper.

Awake, Endymion! gaze upon thy goddess. Too long hast thou slumbered; awake! A little while, and she is lost to you—lost in the light of another's day; a little while, and a tiny crescent dawns upon your despairing vision; a little while, and a half-formed orb gives promise of a bright maturity; again a little while, she rises at her full and smiles upon you. Endymion, awake!

His eyes had not quitted her face for an instant. His thought the while had been something like this: "How exquisitely beautiful! The face of Helen, the voice of a siren, the figure of a sylph, with the grace of a gazelle. A more gifted and fairer type of the too fair mother. Life is no longer aimless."

Pardon, reader, the extravagance of a guileless and enamored youth reveling in the sunshine and blossoms of his fortieth summer, especially when you learn that his dignity and self-command were in no way compromised thereby.

"I approve your choice," was the thanks she got. "You sing well;" in his natural even tone.

"And pray, sir student!" confronting him saucily, "in what school have you been studying flattery? It is a late accomplishment, acquired since last I saw you."

"Excuse me; I had forgotten. You don't like compliments."

"No." And she did not. Candid to a fault, it was a game she never indulged in, and preferred that others should prove by acts rather than words their estimate of herself.

Lionel Harrison was deservedly considered a fine-looking man. In height slightly above the average, of fine physique and easy bearing, a high broad brow, and features, though regular, de-

cidedly masculine. But one thing he lacked to make him handsome; some erratic star had crossed his horoscope, giving him a pair of deep gray eyes instead of the midnight orbs that would have harmonized more perfectly with the jet black hair. Even Myra was compelled to admit as much, notwithstanding youth's enemy, as the sympathetic confidant of some early disappointment, had left here and there a silvery tear-drop upon his sable coronal. The nature of her impressions, however, can be better understood hereafter.

For herself, she was by no means the Venus that her too partial friend would believe her. Her form was lithe and graceful certainly, her lineaments delicate and symmetrical; yet, as to the actual contour, there were many prettier faces; it was the soul, revealed through the large expressive eye, now slumberous, now sparkling, and in which lay more than half her charms.

He criticised and admired her paintings. The conversation turned upon art, and then upon school life generally.

"You liked Heywood?" he asked presently.

She looked thoughtful. "That can be answered both in the affirmative and negative; on the whole, yes. Hard study and oftentimes mortification hung in one scale, improvement and reward as a counterbalance in the other. Nothing good or great can be achieved without labor, and I think the most redeeming feature in the human constitution is a tendency to forget whatever is disagreeable, and remember only that which is pleasant."

"But you are glad to get back, glad to be at home, glad to lay aside your books?"

"Glad to get back, glad to be at home, I certainly am; but I do not intend to give up study simply because I am no longer compelled to recite to a professor, there being a higher Master whose eye we can never evade. Nothing can be more erroneous than the idea entertained by some persons, that their education is *finished* when the curriculum is completed. I look upon the preparation at school merely as the ground work; it is for the student to decide whether or not he will build thereon."

"True, but you are an enthusiast, and, I fear, slightly fanatical on this subject. This question, like all others, has two sides; and while your views are, to a certain extent, correct, there is a limit to, and a season for all things. I should think that you had had

enough of study for the present, your mind needs rest and recreation. Besides, you must remember that you are a school-girl no longer; society has claims on you; you should not live for self alone."

"Exactly, society has claims; it shall have its due; but I do not wish to give up all my time to pleasure; we should have some higher aim in life than a ceaseless round of dissipation."

"Strange words from one of your age and sex."

"Unusual, perhaps; but not strange. The mind is a fertile field; it must, and will yield something—roses or brambles. I prefer the former."

The dinner bell rang. A look of mutual surprise told how swiftly the hours had passed. Both had had a pleasant morning; to one it had been more than pleasant.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MESSRS. SIMS.

LIONEL volunteered to instruct his little friend in the mysteries of horsemanship—she being somewhat out of practice—and during one of their rides, on passing Cedar Grove, Myra chanced to speak of their singular neighbors and he remembered something he had to communicate. It was to the effect that the Messrs. Sims had been—to use his own expression—"struck" with her appearance at church, and had expressed a desire to call, provided it would be agreeable.

She was strolling in the garden a few evenings after, when Aunt Jemima rushed into her presence with: "Lor, mistis! who *does* you reckon is in de parlor?"

"I have no idea, Aunt Jemima; some one of consequence, judging from your excitement."

"Nor 'taint, nuther. 'Tis dem Simses."

"Who?"

"De Sims boys; dem furriners," contemptuously; "de Lord only knows what dey come for; and Mars' Lionel fotch 'em, too; dat gits me."

Aunt Jemima's words were verified, and she found Lionel, with

the youths aforementioned, patiently awaiting her entrance. Her first emotion was curiosity, her next amusement; and she dared not encounter Lionel's equivocal eyes as he went through the introductions with studied ceremoniousness.

Mr. Rodolphus (the elder) had spent extraordinary care upon his toilet. He did not intend that his time and trouble should count for nothing. He sat where his elegant person might enjoy a full benefit of the light, which elegant person Myra analyzed as follows;

First, A pair of hands of astonishing magnitude, feet of corresponding proportions.

Secondly, An enormous cravat of sapphire silk richly embroidered in amber butterflies.

Thirdly, A massive watch-chain that dangled conspicuously from the front, and with which he was wont to occupy the first-named Herculean members.

Fourthly, A dress coat, handsome, but rather tight, purchased probably before the wearer had fully attained the *embonpoint* of early manhood.

Lastly, A pair of pale blue eyes, which, judging from outward evidences, must have been *liquid* in the extreme. They leered at her nervously from out their protrusive sockets as he bowed awkwardly, slightly agitated but intensely complacent.

His brother, who had taken refuge in a more shadowy corner of the apartment, was a size smaller, more juvenile in appearance, and more modestly attired. His features were of a different mould, of a clearer and more intellectual cast, but the general air, to say nothing of hair and complexion, undeniably averred their consanguinity.

Rodolphus, as senior, took the lead in conversation—nay, monopolized it. He was energetic—his tone expressed it; he was coarse—his manner showed it; he was conceited—his words betrayed it; he was soulless—his sentiments proved it. He evidently proposed making an "impressson," and his tongue, having been once set in motion, appeared indefatigable. Having begun to talk, he made no pause, as though he feared if he did, he would never be able to begin again; and talk he did, incessantly, and with increasing animation, inspirited by the inward conviction that he was producing an effect upon the mind of his fair listener, construing her silence into unspeakable admiration.

Silent she certainly was; she could hardly have been otherwise, the extreme loquacity of her guest allowing her no opportunity to edge in a remark—leaving her nothing to do but listen, wonder, and admire!

He discussed the current items of neighborhood gossip with refreshing gusto, and Myra was made to wonder more than once at her total ignorance of the private affairs of the worthy denizens who went to make up the community in which she lived. No subject was left untouched,—public enterprise, domestic differences, politics, love, and religion all were in turn exhausted. The latter seemed, for some reason, a theme of unusual interest; again and again he strayed from it, again and again he returned. "Now, there's ma," he said, finally; "*she's* a churchwoman. I believe she would have prayers night and morning if the house were burning down over her head. For my part, I can't see the use in praying when you don't feel like it. Sometimes I go, when the lesson is short; when it is long, I don't. Henry, here," with a patronizing glance at that minor individual, "is no more than a baby; he likes it no better than I do, but suffers himself to be tied to an apron string and led about like a pet poodle. The fact is, I don't see the good of so much religion any way, unless you intend to be a parson, or something of that kind.

"I once had a notion of studying for the church myself," he went on, loftily, "but afterwards thought better of it and concluded that it was too much of a bore. If it were only the services on Sundays and holy-days, it would be a different thing; but there are marriages and funerals to do, besides being liable to be called off at any time to administer consolation to a sick pauper. On the whole, it is too much of a bother."

Having made this declaration—having shown himself off—he could afford to take breath. He leaned back in his chair and allowed his large hands to dangle idly at his side, serenely self-satisfied.

She looked at his brother: he had never changed expression. She looked at Lionel: a moment before "disgust" could alone have expressed her feelings, but a glance at the latter's mirth-lit countenance sent her fan to her face, and it was with the greatest difficulty that she could refrain from laughing outright.

The probabilities were that they would stay to tea, albeit it was their first call; it was already dark, and still they lingered.

The meal was announced; never was music sweeter, offering as it did a brief interval of relief. They rose to go. Myra invited them to remain. They were easily persuaded; they staid.

"Shall I send you tea or coffee?" asked Mrs. Marston, from the head of the table.

"Coffee, if you please," said Mr. Rodolphus, a little eagerly; "I never drink tea, it's too nasty."

Mrs. Marston arched her brows in astonishment; a mischievous twinkle lurked in her husband's eye as he went on with his carving; Lionel involuntarily stole a glance at Myra, who sat opposite; while she, in turn, became suddenly absorbed in the contents of her plate. Aunt Jemima elevated her venerable proboscis and carried it in the air the rest of the evening. None of the party could suppress a smile whenever the incident recurred to their memories, although they afterwards learned that the term was peculiar to their nation, and bore a signification altogether different from that understood by Virginians.

Some physician has, by experimenting with dyspeptics, ascertained that the liver, rather than the heart, is the seat of the affections. In the present instance the theory was confirmed, and while the premonitory symptoms of what was formerly known as the "malady of the heart" vary with the disposition, the diagnosis is the same. No sooner were they seated around the hospitable board than Mr. Henry's tongue was mysteriously loosened, and he talked with a fluency and affability that was both creditable to himself and agreeable to his host. His humor and appetite bore an infallible ratio; his rise of spirits and the calling into action of his digerent organs being coeval—his vivacity increasing each time he was invited to partake of some fresh delicacy. His entertainers were satisfied to note the effect without enquiring into causes; aunt Jemima's penetration was more acute. His brother, on the other hand, appeared to be differently constituted: upon him the process acted as a gentle narcotic, it quieted his nerves, rendering him totally indifferent to all the world, Mr. Rodolphus Sims excepted. He soon became drowsy, and relapsed into a profound silence from which no one cared to arouse him.

They had not long returned to the drawing-room when

Lionel slipped out to enjoy a quiet smoke in the library; whereupon, Rodolphus seized upon a copy of the "Times" which he discovered lying upon the centre-table, and utterly ignoring the presence of his companions, settled himself comfortably in a corner of the sofa and set about studying the market reports, hoping to calculate through that medium the probable rise in beef during the ensuing winter, feeling a peculiar interest in the issue from the fact that his father was contemplating a bovine speculation.

Being now left tete-a-tete with Henry, and he being no longer fearful of interfering with his big brother (as had evidently been the case before tea) she found the younger—though not altogether so animated as under the late favorable auspices—sensible, and almost entertaining. She discovered that he was fond of reading; they were now no longer at a loss for themes as their favorite authors were discussed one after another.

If left alone, they would have gotten on very pleasantly together. Presently they were disturbed by a sound from the sofa—something between a laugh and a growl—and a hoarse voice said brusquely: "Well! I must say that you two are hard run for something to talk about."

To say that Myra was astounded, would be in no way to describe her emotions. She had thought that she was prepared for anything, but such unprovoked rudeness she had never seen nor dreamt of. Her large eyes flashed; she rested them full upon him, measured him from head to foot; she said nothing.

He did not see the look, and would not have felt it if he had.

"And you read novels?" still intent upon his paper.

"I do," in a severe, haughty tone. "Is there anything odd or remarkable in the fact?"

"I don't," in no way discomfited; "I don't throw away my time on any such nonsense."

"Fiction is not necessarily nonsense."

"All that I ever read was—sentimental nonsense. Love and adventure! bosh! made-up tales to get people's money."

"They could spend it more unprofitably."

"And the time?"

"Passed much more agreeably—at least, with me—and certainly more harmlessly than in idle gossip about our kind and inoffensive neighbors," pointedly.

"Lovesick—silly! Hairbreadth escapes—tush!" pursued the imperturbable Sims, taking no notice of the scathing rebuke.

"Love—*real* love—is not silly," said his contestant warmly. "Hairbreadth escapes or not, it is hard for the imagination to conceive anything more startling or more improbable than accidents that are actually occurring daily, almost hourly, if we may rely upon our telegraphs as authority. I think," she went on in a milder tone, "that there must be some special Providence to rule over the destinies of the brave and noble; heroic spirits must have peculiar claims upon divine protection. Think of the many miraculous deliverances in cases of those who have hazarded all for the good of their fellow-men. I am tempted to claim for real heroes what has been ascribed to those of romance, 'a cork-jacket, which carries them safe through all the billows of affliction.'"

Heroism! bravery and nobility! "pearls before swine!" Mr. Sims drew forth a silk pocket-handkerchief with which he mopped his forehead, then spread the gaudy square upon his lap. "No nature, no variety in them," he objected.

"Very little in life," was the ready rejoinder. "Human nature is the same the world over, actuated by similar feelings and motives, governed merely by circumstances and surroundings."

"They all get married, and that's the end of them."

"Most people do, when they meet the right person."

Mr. Sims was becoming irritated. He liked to have his own way; he always had, and always meant to. He liked to carry his point, even upon as trivial a question as the one under discussion. He was anything but a ladies' man. He had always intended to marry, when, by so doing, he could possess himself of a fortune ample enough to render the step advantageous; but for the fair sex in general he had a supreme contempt. He looked upon them all as stupid, simpering, and wishy-washy; in short, as an inferior order of creation, whose sole mission in life was to administer to the comfort of man, their incomparable superior. To be outdone to be out-argued by a woman, a chit of a girl, was something he was not prepared for. He fidgeted uneasily. "Childish, trashy!" he muttered petulantly.

Myra was seldom rude; never unless exasperated beyond all powers of endurance. She was exasperated now. The presump-

tion, the unblushing insolence of this vulgar, egotistical pretender, was something *she* was not prepared for, and would not brook.

"I am surprised that any sensible person should indulge in such language," she said, in measured accents, levelling a piercing glance at him. "Fiction comprises some of our finest specimens of literature. Good novels (and those of an objectionable nature we are not compelled to read) cannot fail to instruct and improve, as our own characters unconsciously assimilate such as inspire us with love and admiration. I speak from personal experience when I affirm that historical events and information generally can be more easily retained when associated with some pleasing story. I am, like many others, unfortunately endowed with a poor memory, and do not deem it an exaggeration when I say that I am more indebted to fiction for the authentic incidents with which I am acquainted than to all the histories I ever studied."

The paper was cast aside with an impatient gesture; the ruddy face and watery eyes were turned toward her. "*I* never learned anything from them," as though to dismiss a subject unworthy of further discussion, and in tones that would have been half angry, had he been less confident of his own judgment and abilities.

She met the look fearlessly. Fire leaped to her eye; for a moment it glowed, then melted in disdain. Saying simply, but with marked emphasis: "That is quite obvious," she turned and resumed her conversation with the younger brother, as coolly as though nothing had occurred.

He, meanwhile, had never opened his lips during the altercation; he had not taken sides, he had advanced no opinion. When Myra's pleasant voice addressed him, he looked embarrassed—worse than that—he looked positively frightened.

That last observation had completely silenced the elder Sims. He stared at her awhile curiously, steadily, with an expression of "What do you mean?" then returned to his paper. Something in her face awed him; something in her manner overpowered him. He had received an impression; that girl was not like other girls. A change was going on in that thick brain of his; a new feeling had been awakened within him. It might have been respect (if he *could* respect anything short of gold); it might have been fear (more probably it was; the bravado is seldom brave at

heart); at any rate, it was *something*, manifested in the friendly disposition he evinced at parting. Walking up to her, with the air of conferring an honor, he tendered her one of his big paws to shake. We say, for *her* to shake, because he offered to perform no such like kindly office on the little white hand which she reluctantly extended him. Henry did not dare presume so far upon their limited acquaintance, but made his adieu in a profound *bend* (it could hardly be called a bow).

She looked in the library before retiring, and found the trio there enjoying the coziest of cozy chats. Her father was in one of his gayest moods, and pulling her upon his lap, asked jocosely: "Well, little one, and how have you spent the evening?"

"To say that it has been passed as unsatisfactorily as unprofitably, would scarcely convey my meaning, father."

"What! weren't the young gentlemen entertaining? I had an impression that neither was deficient in the gift of the gab."

"Conversation—at least, interesting conversation—does not consist in words alone, father; there must be congeniality of thought and feeling also."

"You look grave. What 's the matter?"

"A good deal."

"Anything serious?"

"Yes. In the first place, I lost my temper, which, as you know, is not a pleasant reflection. In the second place, I was exasperated so far as to be rude—rude in my own house—to make remarks that would have offended a gentleman mortally."

"Ahem! A grave insinuation to bring against your late visitors."

"Pardon me; I forgot," with curling lip, "gentlemen?—*of course*. They have wealth, consequently position. It is the vice of American society. Take that from them, and you would see where that same society would place them. That is," she said, recollecting herself, "I'll take that back; at least a part of it. I should not have used a plural in the epithet I adopted; I have no complaint to make against the younger. He is awkward and diffident, true; but modest and gentlemanly, which virtues cover a multitude of faults.'"

"And you can't say as much for the other?"

"No." The tone was enough.

"You are too hard on him. He seems abrupt; that is because he is not familiar with our habits and customs. I don't think he means anything by it, it is more through ignorance than want of respect."

"Just so; but native gentlemanliness will show itself despite habits and customs."

"A queer fish, I admit;" with a laugh.

"I was just thinking," looking around upon the group, "how much more pleasantly the hours would have passed in here with you three."

"An odd speech from a young lady just stepping upon the carpet, eh! 'mother'?" stroking her curls with paternal pride. "If you lose your temper with every one you chance to meet who does not exactly come up to your standard, both morally and intellectually, I am afraid that my little girl has a thorny path before her."

"And you, Lionel! I have a crow to pick with you. Why did you leave me?"

"I feared I might be *de trop;*" returned the interrogated party with a smile. "I wished to do my duty by all present, and did not know but that, with a clear field, you might probably make an 'impression.'"

"Since—judging from superficies—you deemed them both peculiarly susceptible;" with a curious mingling of mischief and irony.

"Precisely. I don't know so well about the other, but I don't believe that that boy Rodolphus is really capable of emotion—that is, tender emotion. He is as cold-blooded a specimen as I have met lately; his heart is as hard as adamant."

"I protest," cried Myra, clapping her hands gleefully, from whose dimpling cheeks and sparkling eyes, the last shadow had disappeared. "I protest. You shall not disgrace so precious a gem by such an irrelevant comparison. If a jewel it be, say rather an incondite emerald. I entertain serious doubt in my own mind, and think the question extremely problematical, as to whether he is endowed with such an attribute as the soul. I think it highly probable that the immortal essence was, through some mysterious oversight, unfortunately omitted in his composition.

"An idea strikes me;" with a merrier twinkle, "The vacuity is supplied by a rubber sack inflated with the gas of self-conceit.

This sack is surrounded by solid ramparts, which can be penetrated by nothing less than a golden bullet, and the more heavily you load the rifle, the more certain you will be to carry the citadel."

A general laugh followed: the fond father patted her cheek playfully. "Too sarcastic! too sarcastic! You will have to learn to curb that little tongue of yours, my dear, else it may get you into no end of scrapes some day. Satire is a dangerours gift, and one which should never be cultivated nor indulged. The world will laugh and applaud, but hate you for it nevertheless."

As Mr. Sims walked home in the starlight, the receding acclivity, with its princely pile, seemed bathed in Utopian splendor. From time to time he involuntarily looked backward. "A valuable estate, by Jove!" was the mental observation. "By Gad! if I wouldn't like to own it."

Mr. Henry's thoughts had been of a somewhat similar nature, until scattered to the winds by a remark from his brother.

"I say, Henry, a fine place this, and a good-looking girl too, by Jove! On the whole, I don't know but that I'll marry her."

"Provided she proves tractable, and answers your proposition affirmatively," suggested Mr. Henry, timidly.

"Pshaw, Henry!" retorted the other fretfully; "what foolish notions you do take up! I thought you had been in this country long enough to have found out that the market was not so glutted with men of property that one need be lightly esteemed. Your proviso is absurd. Besides, she has rather more sense than common—too much to refuse *me*."

Mr. Henry offered no remonstrance, but like a discreet youth, as he was, prudently surrendered without further parley. If the flower of hope had, from the richness of his imagination, sprung prematurely into life, it was, in the present instance, doomed never to blossom, having been nipped in the bud by this last declaration of his fraternal senior. He knew from experience his brother's creed. It was embraced in three words; to wit, "might is right;" and in strict adherence to the letter of his faith, his uttered wish knew no appeal. He was passionate and arbitrary, easily provoked, relentless in his ire. He felt a peculiar pleasure in inflicting pain upon whatever was weaker than himself, in tormenting birds, and in cruelty to animals. He delighted in blood; was there anything to be killed, anything to be butchered, he was

certain to be on the spot. Malicious and revengeful, his word was law in his family, none of whom dared ever to cross him; and his very name was a terror to the domestics, toward whom he showed no consideration or mercy.

Mr. Marston was, as Mr. Sims expressed it, a very hospitable man; and by the way, his—that is, Mr. Sims'—thoughts appeared to be running on *pits* (probably "the pits of darkness") from the force with which he accented the antepenult (according to his pronunciation) of the suggestive adjective. Mr. Marston was a fine liver and still kept up the style of life practiced in former years by the aristocratic race from which he sprang. His brandies and wines were unsurpassed; his halls ever open to one and all, and as kindly a welcome extended to the beggared outcast as to the most distinguished stranger who ever set foot upon his parent soil. No benighted traveler had yet been turned cold and hungry from his door; and many were the widows and orphans who, when overtaken by sickness or distress, had not called in vain for succor, and existing upon his bounty, sung his praises for miles around.

With these extraordinary incentives to the growth of his affection, Mr. Sims became suddenly infatuated with the heiress of Violet Bank, and if his heart was not touched, his liver was. He was, emphatically, *a business man*, and having once conceived a venal project, no obstacle nor rebuff could daunt its prosecution. His visits became weekly and semi-weekly; and it was a remarkable fact and one extensively commented upon in the kitchen, that in his numerous calls, paid at every hour during the afternoon, the tea bell invariably caught him just on the point of leaving; but what was more remarkable still, he never went, nor did he until the stars were out and mine host had been toasted in a ruby draught.

Myra was in a dilemma. The unspeakable aversion with which his first visit had inspired her had only increased with time and intercourse. She was more and more disgusted every day, and in her utter detestation of his name and presence, his manners appeared more proletarian and his society more odious. The propinquity of their residences rendered open variance the reverse of pleasant, but her upright nature knew no such word as dissimulation, hence she made no attempt to conceal her dislike; on the contrary, studied to convince him of the estimation in which he

was held. She practiced upon him the most unmistakable slights, and whenever an opportunity occurred, devoted herself exclusively to his brother, whose visits were scarcely less frequent, and who was indebted to the flattering comparison for his present popularity rather than to any special merit or personal attraction on his part. He was, in the meantime, in no way discouraged however. He remarked the growing intimacy between Myra and Henry with genuine satisfaction, without so much as a jealous twinge. He introduced for solace and encouragement a system of reasoning, and was wont to soliloquize on this wise: "Love is ever shy; she avoids me, therefore she is in love with me. *Quod erat demonstrandum.* Keep your eyes open, Rodolphus, my boy, 'Faint heart never won fair lady.'"

That any one could fail to be enamored of Mr. Rodolphus Sims was a possibility that had never suggested itself; and while he was desirous that the propitious event should take place as early as practicable, he still preserved a just regard for propriety, living in bright anticipations of the thrice blessed day that should witness the transfer of deeds and donations.

The assiduous attentions with which he annoyed her subjected her to the constant raillery of the entire home circle, servants not excepted, and her father and Lionel were incorrigible. At length, becoming desperate, she appealed to the former, declaring that she could stand their ridicule no longer; and that if that "stupid clown" did not desist in his persecutions, she would do or say something rude—something he could no fail to understand.

That gentleman only laughed the merrier, finding a fresh source of amusement in her annoyance. He protested against any rash threats, and consoled her by telling her that if young ladies would make themselves so attractive as to captivate objectionable young gentlemen, they must be content to endure the consequences. Had she been less truthful, she might, upon occasion of his visits, have pleaded "a headache," but she could not act a falsehood, be the alternative as disagreeable as it might.

Had Mr. Sims' taste been more æsthetic, his conversation more elegant and his mien more graceful, he might have been a more successful competitor for the prize he so confidently thought to win. As it was, his feet were too large, and his hands wore an embarrassed air of being always in the way. Myra's sympathies

were aroused in behalf of the unfortunate watch-chain, and she wished in her heart that he could leave the troublesome appendages at home.

All her efforts having proved futile, she changed from cold to frigid, from dignified to taciturn; and Mr. Rodolphus, notwithstanding his incipient vauntings, could not suppress some slight misgivings when brought face to face with the object of his adoration. He could not interpret her conduct toward himself, and began to distrust his former ratiocinations as possibly fallacious. He found wooing an heiress a more formidable undertaking than he had anticipated; he became uneasy, and resolved upon changing his tactics. To this end, he added hair oil and perfume to the other attractions of his toilet; fell from arrogance to humility itself, with a ludicrous attempt at seeming tenderness. The last method proving more ineffectual than the first, he was on the verge of despair when a happy thought revived his sinking hopes. He had somewhere heard that the surest road to the daughter's heart was to gain the ill-will of the mother; he determined to put it to the test. Under this delusion, it was amusing to watch the purblind lover, entirely ignoring the gentle mother, while to the daughter he was obsequiously deferential. He discovered that the latter was fond of music, and ordered a violin forthwith. He was sure that in a short while and with a little practice he would become proficient, since Mr. Eustace (a young gentleman in the neighborhood) had learned to play in three weeks, and he was certain that he had as much sense as Mr. Eustace. In this he was doomed to a signal failure; but not to be outdone, he decided upon the cultivation of his voice. Accordingly, he registered his name in a vocal class and soothed himself daily into a tranquil siesta to the plaintive lullaby of "do, re, me," etc., etc. But after he had inflicted serious injuries upon his lungs, the session ended with the same unsatisfactory result.

Autumn had come and gone. The fleecy robes of winter had stamped "December" upon the leafless boughs; the summer songster piped no more his joyous lay, and the chilling blast swept o'er a barren landscape.

Myra and her friends had, meanwhile, kept up an animated correspondence, and each fleeting week brought love-laden letters from Florence and Henrietta. They were to meet at Violet

Bank and spend the approaching carnival, which Myra looked forward to as impatiently as any six-year-old child. "Christmas" was now the finis to every wish, and "when Florence and Henrietta come" the refrain to every song.

CHAPTER VII.

AN ENJOYABLE OCCASION.

"NEW-YEAR'S eve! Can it be that seven whole days have elapsed since I welcomed my darling friends to Violet Bank? It scarcely seems as many hours." Such was Myra's exclamation as she stood in the dim fire-light of her own room, with an arm encircling the waist of each of her school-fellows.

"Oh! pleasure—ephemeral pleasure!

'Like the rainbow's lovely form
Evanishing amid the storm—
Nae man can tether time or tide.'

And just to think that you will insist upon leaving me to-morrow! I declare, girls! it is *too* bad. I don't see how I can give you up, and know I shall perish with the blues when you are gone?"

"You cannot be half so sorry as I," said Henrietta, with an honest hug. "Dear girl! do you know that this has been one of the happiest weeks I ever spent? Nothing would afford me more pleasure than to prolong our visit; but I promised mamma to stay no longer, and I cannot break my word to her, you know."

"It is quite too heart-rending to think of," cried Florence. Tear-drops glistened in the eyes of blue as she pressed her cherry lips to the delicate cheek of her companion.

"Good Lord! What is yawl about?" It was Aunt Jemima who broke in upon these girlish lamentations, as she bustled in, lamp in hand, with a world of "responsibility" upon her corrugated brow. "Bless my soul! ef I didn't 'spect to find all of you dressed and ready to go in de parlor, and here you is, all three standin' up here in de dark, jest as well satisfied as ef you had all day before you. 'Tis long arter dark, mistis; de folks will jest be a troopin' in here present'y, and you certain'y ought to be ready to 'ceive 'em."

"She is right, girls," said Myra, disengaging herself and commencing her toilet; "it is later than I thought. We shall have to hurry. We need a lamp, Aunt Jemima; if you are busy, send it up by Lily."

The old woman hurried out, muttering something about "dem child'en;" she "wondered what did make young gals so thoughtless," and she "didn't know what would 'come of 'em ef 'twon't no ole folks to look after em."

Lily, the house girl, whose jetty complexion testified to the appropriateness of the name, soon made her appearance, and depositing the light, began rummaging in her pocket, from the spacious depths of which she produced a neat card, upon which was inscribed "Oscar Maurice," in a firm masculine hand. A crimson blush swept over the face and neck of Henrietta, transforming the peach-blossom tints into vivid roses, as the girl approached her with a grin.

Lily was garrulous in her importance. "There is a young gentleman down stairs, ma'am, and a stranger in these parts, 'cause I'm certain I never seen him before. I heard the door-bell as I was coming up, so stopped and invited him in. He looks like he might have been travelling, and I expect he got in on the six o'clock train. He asked me if the young ladies were in, and told me to give that card to Miss Henrietta Bryant."

"He is the friend of whom you spoke this morning?" said Myra, coming to her relief.

"Yes," regaining her composure; "he is to be my convoy home. Florence came by for me, but will return by a different route, leaving me without a companion."

"Judging from his chirography, I should deem him well worthy of his trust," rejoined her hostess, as she subjected the autograph to a more critical inspection. "Were I sufficiently versed in the art to divine one's character by the handwriting, I should say that he was both honest and brave. I am ready to welcome, and feel sure that I shall like any one whom you call 'friend,' dear Henrietta; but I cannot say that I am glad to see Mr. Maurice,—to-night, at any rate,—if for meeting him I am to pay the penalty of losing you."

The week had indeed slipped by, but neither of our *debutantes* could tell exactly how. The wealthy citizens of S—— were re-

solved to sustain the reputation which their county had long enjoyed, and neither trouble nor expense was spared in the celebration of the festive holidays. And so it was that our young friends found themselves plunged in a social maelstrom, as balls and parties were attended in breathless succession. There was scarcely a house in B—— whose doors were not thrown open to receive the indefatigable merry-makers, and hardly a person of note for miles around who was not precipitated in the dizzy vortex. Even Mrs. Harrison, the oldest resident in the place, had not forgotten the days of her girlhood, for, notwithstanding the silver crest with which seventy winters had crowned her, she still retained within her benevolent heart a loving corner for the young and gay. No one was more ready to contribute to their amusement, and her soiree of the evening before was by no means the least enjoyable.

Mr. Marston proposed finishing the round with what promised to be *the* party of the season. The expectation of the fashionable circle was at its height, and he was determined that they should not be disappointed. His parties were proverbial. No one could give more pleasurable entertainments, and whether a conversazione or Terpsichorean, he invariable carried off the palm. His laurels were never known to wilt, and the general verdict upon such occasions had been stereotyped into "*comme il faut.*" Every one had a "splendid time;" no one was ever in a hurry to leave, each merry reveler framing some plausible excuse for remaining until etiquette forced him to depart, and at parting the hand of the jolly host was subjected to a cordial "squeeze," accompanied by the wish that he might live to issue tickets for many more of a similar character. His universal success was, to some, a mystery; but, like all other mysteries, when understood, was simple enough. Being "in peace and charity with all men," he was entirely at ease himself, and possessed the happy knack of inspiring his guests with sensations as agreeable as his own. He was thoroughly conversant with the laws of hospitality, saw that every one knew every one else and that each individual was entirely satisfied with himself and those around him.

A deep snow had fallen during the day, and though it had ceased as night came on, the leaden clouds still hung low and threatening.

The clock below tolled eight. Myra raised the curtain and

looked out. An exclamation burst from her, as airy snowflakes sailed noiselessly past, like so many white-winged fairies.

"Just look, girls! another snow storm. Is it not *too* bad? Do come and see. I am so much afraid that our party will be a failure after all. Is it not a grand sight, though? What a frolic they are having in mid-air!"

"Dispel your fears, my dear; timid indeed must be the heart that would not brave both wind and storm for the pleasure that awaits them," said Florence, who was adding the factitious bloom of rouge to the native freshness of her complexion, and who was engaged in a mental criticism of her reflected image as she paused between each several application to note the effect with a smile of satisfaction.

They were still speaking when the heavy thud of horses' hoofs rung out upon the frosty air, and as they dashed with headlong speed down the frozen carriage-way, each moment brought them nearer and nearer, until the sound was prolonged into a continuous roar, like the roll of distant thunder or the measured tread of approaching cavalry. The jingling sleigh-bells were not more musical than the silvery peals of rippling laughter that floated hither through the stilly night. Brilliant flights of oratory, from the attendant cavaliers, were interrupted now and then by a frightened scream as a sleigh was occasionally upset by some gallant escort, who was vainly endeavoring to watch through the darkness the movements of his fair companion rather than those of his spirited steed.

"They are coming!" cried Myra and Henrietta, in a breath.

"Confess that I am a true prophetess," said Florence, joining them by the window.

Their mirth became more noisy as they clambered up the slippery terrace, followed by loud stampings upon the portico, as they scraped their snow-clogged boots and brushed away the downy fugitives. They arrived in couples and parties of three and four, each figure muffled in surtout and furs, which set at defiance the winter's blast.

Now all was bustle and confusion; each sylph was busy with her own toilet. Gentlemen, fearful of being "cut out," sent up their cards, and before the fledging process was completed, each popular belle could display a well filled tablet. At length, a mur-

mured "ready" was telegraphed through the dressing-rooms, and meeting their escorts in the hall, they descended to the drawing-room.

The library and sitting-room had been thrown into one and converted for the nonce into a capacious ball-room, while the parlors were reserved for such couples as could resist the enticing strains of a *bass violin*, and preferred a quiet *tete-a-tete* to the excitement and fatigue of their dancing neighbors. Here all was ablaze with beauty and splendor. Yule logs crackled cheerily upon the glowing hearth-stone, the shimmering lights danced upon floral decorations of every hue, and fell upon the soft carpets in shattered rainbows; graceful festoons depended from the portraits of the ancient Marstons who smiled down upon the assembly from their respective niches, while the conservatory exhaled a mingling of exquisite odors.

The *elite* of S—— had turned out *en masse;* ladies of every age and in every phase of belleship, from the larva stage of fifteen to the bedizened butterfly of forty, about whom white waistcoats, dresscoats and mustachios circumambulated in imposing phalanx.

Mr. Marston claimed the right of "opening the ball," and invariably led his wife to the floor, despite her earnest protestations.

Myra was not disappointed in her preconceived opinion of Henrietta's friend. There was a certain frankness in his manner that won her confidence at once, and a smile, as sunny as Henrietta's own, that gave a peculiar charm to an otherwise handsome countenance. She had heard from the latter that he was excessively fond of her favorite amusement, and recognizing his claims as a stranger, had placed his name at the head of her list. She had eyes, and she had penetration; she was not slow to interpret a certain young man's quiet deference, nor the unwonted crimson with which a few low-spoken words suffused a soft, dark cheek. She drew her own conclusions and kept her own counsel.

There was a troubled shadow in the soul-lit eyes. At her mother's request he had come down to attend Henrietta home on the morrow, with no suspicion of the evening's gaiety. He felt annoyed (and a sweeping glance took in the scene around him) at finding himself an uninvited and stranger guest in the halls of mirth and revelry. He was saying something to this effect, when Myra cut his apologies short with easy assurance.

The band struck up an enlivening air, and as the preliminary chords resounded through the crowded apartments, the general buzz for a moment subsided.

Oscar's depression vanished with the first note. "Blessings on the man who first invented music," he said to his partner.

"Amen!" returned she gayly.

"It would move stones."

"I have heard of Orpheus."

"Those notes are certainly entrancing."

"Our county is famed for its music."

"You are, like myself, no lukewarm participant in this innocent pastime," with a keen glance; "I read it in your eyes."

"'The man that hath no music in himself,'—you know the rest. And—" she subjoined laughingly, "if you will pardon a vulgar phrase, I will, for the sake of variety, fall from the sublime to the ridiculous, and say with the old gentleman, whose indolence suggested an abridgment of his orisons: 'Them 's my sentiments.' Music has a novel effect upon me; it vibrates through every sentient atom of my being, lifts me above the groveling realities of life, and inspires me with higher and nobler emotions. I am never so happy as when listening to the weird discourse of some witching melody, and, when under the spell of its enchantment, to harbor an unkind thought or feeling toward any living creature were no less an impossibility than to convey to another any adequate conception of my sensations. I must give vent to my feelings in some way, so have no alternative but to transfer the quickening heart-throbs to my feet, and tone down my intoxication by fatigue and exhaustion."

"What a galaxy of fair faces!" observed Lionel, joining them; "and what an incomprehensible mystery that a man could exist, surrounded by so much grace and beauty, and find himself at the age of forty still pursuing his solitary pilgrimage upon the lonely turnpike of single blessedness."

"Perhaps their charms are so manifold and so equally distributed, that you find it difficult to center your affections," said Oscar gallantly.

The merriment was at its height. Momus and Terpsichore had joined hands, and with combined energies ordained that the evening should be one of unparalleled delight. Jocund voices were

wafted hither from every quarter—small talk and pretty nothings being largely in the ascendency. Gentleman twirled their mustachios, and made soft speeches to their fair companions, who listened with downcast eyes and blushing cheeks, while occasionally a sentimental pair, on suddenly discovering that "the rooms were too warm and the air oppressive," strolled out upon the veranda to watch "the immaculate snow flakes."

Florence was in her element; she pirouetted and coquetted, stumbling upon a flirtation at every turn in the musical meander.

Presently they were summoned to the refreshment-room, where the long tables groaned beneath their loads of sumptuous viands, the "substantials" being a leading feature. This was followed by another and daintier feast, and the ladies were not suffered to withdraw as toast after toast was recited to the accompaniment of champagne stopples.

A little later, Myra was making a prefatory circuit of the rooms upon the arm of Mr. Eustace before joining in the dance which was then forming, when the current of her conversation was turned by a laughing observation from her companion.

"I have sometimes, Miss Marston, beheld specimens of the amphibious creation, but Sims, poor fellow, appears to have no element at all."

Following his eyes, she discovered Mr. Henry dejected and forlorn, "like some lone bird without a mate," who, having taken covert in the shadows of the folding-doors, was gazing with a whipped-dog expression after Florence's graceful figure, as she glided past in a bewildering waltz, struck, not so much by her face as by the diamond pendants that hung from her brooch and ear-drops.

"What a dismal picture!" was her comment, turning aside her head to hide the smile that played upon her red lips. "Looks so ill-befitting the time and occasion must be allowed no longer."

Approaching him, she said pleasantly, "You look lonesome, Mr. Sims; pray! how are you enjoying the evening?"

"Oh! ah!" with a sudden start, and blushing violently; "I am getting on very well, thank you; that is,—oh! ah!—I am having a tolerable time," stammered Mr Henry, in great confusion.

"But why are you not dancing? Are not you a votary? or are you prejudiced against it?"

"Oh, no!" he expostulated, recovering himself, "I should be only too delighted; but I am awkward, you see, and don't know the steps; so, being a stranger, I dislike to ask any of the ladies to be my partner."

"An obstacle easily removed; you shall plead that excuse no longer," her sympathies aroused, despite her amusement. "Mr. Eustace, can I take the liberty?" erasing his name.

"Provided I am honored with the next," stipulated the ex-partner, with a martyr air.

Mr. Henry was highly flattered by the unlooked-for honor, and bowed and smiled an embarrassed acknowledgment.

There was a general elevation of eyebrows as they took their places, followed by the significant cough, consequent upon the simultaneous raising of fans and bouquets. She commenced her instructions with easy confidence—a delicate hint now and then, or a mild suggestion. Much to her chagrin, and the intense amusement of the crowd, however, her pupil *pro tempore* proved himself peculiarly refractory—not in will, but in motion. Had he been blindfolded and turned loose in the Cretan labyrinth, his face could not have worn an expression of more hopeless perplexity. He floundered about in agonizing bewilderment, reminding one of a wild mustang, unknown alike to rein or rider, which, finding itself in the midst of savage sportsmen, meets a lasso in every reckless plunge. The musicians, no longer able to preserve their measure, now descended from the stand, adding energy to skill in the endeavor to keep time with his wayward gambols.

"Your magnanimity has prompted you to assume a Sisyphus undertaking," whispered Lionel, as he brushed past her; "the stone has a decided proclivity backward."

He had scarcely finished speaking when their attention was arrested by an affected scream from the owner of a mutilated train, Mr. Henry having, in one of his random strides, severed skirt and corsage, to the unutterable vexation of that fastidious young lady. The innocent and unfortunate perpetrator was entirely overcome by this last hapless blunder; his hair hung close and dank about the heated brow, upon which large beads of perspiration stood like pearls upon a crimson billow. His wits deserting him, and his embarrassment increasing, he found himself

no longer able to brave the brewing storm; hastening to offer an incoherent apology, he beat a precipitate retreat, retiring in disgust.

Mr. Rodolphus had passed the most delightful of delightful evenings. Lulled into blissful dreams of landed estates, thoroughbred cattle, improved poultry, and sparkling wines by that magical nepenthe, "supper," he was content to see his intended bride monopolized by others, finding, as he did, the society of the smoking-room much more congenial. Stretched at full length upon a lounge, he entertained himself with glancing over the *Times*, and discussing the rise and fall of stocks with the middle-aged gentlemen who occasionally wandered to and fro.

Morning! The last merry party had bidden a reluctant adieu. Florence and Oscar stood chatting by the mantel; Henrietta was singing a farewell song for Lionel, who leaned with careless abandon upon the opposite side of the piano. Myra opened the casement and looked out upon a cloudless sky, from which had vanished all traces of the evening's storm—the distant hills, with their spotless robes and gem-laden evergreens, glistening in the matin sunlight.

"I discovered a secret last night," she said to Henrietta, when they were alone.

"I know what you mean," was the frank, but modest reply. "And you like him?" anxiously.

"*Very* much."

"I am so glad," said the warm-hearted girl, her maiden diffidence put to flight by the other's sincerity. "Oscar and I are old acquaintances, and have loved since childhood. He is an orphan, with no other fortune than an unimpeachable character and a noble heart; mamma is a widow, you know, and as she will have the younger children to provide for, will not, of course, be able to help us. But," she added, "he is young, and strong, and willing, and," with a tender light in the soft black eyes, "we are content to wait."

CHAPTER VIII.

MYRA'S FIRST SEASON.

CONTRARY to Myra's expectation, there was no cessation of gayeties, no depressing *ennui* upon the departure of her friends. The rage for amusement was peculiarly contagious; the more remote circles had caught the infection; there were balls, parties, hops and sociables without number; besides concerts and private theatricals, in which the amateur performers vied in talent and popularity. These she entered into with the rapturous delight of a novice, who is at the same time young, and ardent in temperament; and to those who had known her from childhood, it was interesting to note the zest with which she began a social career opening before her like a radiant vista, roseate in its Orient flushes, brilliant with the iridescent glow of youthful promise—no less an enthusiast in her present pursuits than she had formerly been in art or the investigation of ontological phenomena. Her native acumen, grace of manner and ready repartee had won for her a host of admirers, and ere she was aware, she awoke to find herself the cynosure of every circle, the observed of all observers. Her acting was "artistic," her dancing "perfect," her singing "divine," her conversation "a pellucid stream of wit and pathos." Gentlemen of every age, from the imperialed youth to the dignified bachelor (which latter, having arrived at years of discretion, had learned to appreciate and admire, inasmuch as he had passed through every phase of yearning and heart-thirst, as year after year he had watched, like Tantalus, that for which he pined always in tempting proximity, yet just beyond his grasp) flitted about the radiant thing like moths about a burning taper—those honored with her preference loud in their eulogiums, while less fortunate contestants quietly withdrew, with singed wings and a secret longing for revenge.

With these manifold and antagonistic claims upon her time and thoughts, Myra found her good resolutions and cherished schemes for intellectual advancement being rapidly swept away by the gale of pleasure. For a while she reconciled her conscience with

the assurance that they were only deferred, to be prosecuted with two-fold zeal at some more convenient season; but the "more convenient season" never came, and, like the seeds that fell among thorns, they were choked out, and finally abandoned; for notwithstanding her superiority of head and heart over the generality of her sex, she was, nevertheless, *a woman*. She had had a taste of the intoxicating cup and found it sweet; she was not wholly invulnerable to the delicate adulation of an admiring world.

The leading belles, especially those who had reigned supreme through several seasons past, regarded her as an interloper, and disliked her accordingly. Too politic, however, to give utterance to their real sentiments,—the betrayal of which would have been fatal to their already waning popularity,—they equipped themselves in defensive armor (amiability), and commenced the siege, compliments being the most efficient weapon in this species of warfare. Their verdict was one and the same. "She was a very superior young lady," according to their own account; a *beau ideal* of beauty and perfection. Intriguing mothers with marriageable daughters, to say nothing of that portion of the community so remarkable for charity and sweetness of disposition, and universally known as "old maids with younger sisters," looked on with proud disdain and lofty disapproval, their circumscribed intellects propounding meanwhile such queries as, " They wondered what the young men *could* see to admire about that girl! For their parts, they had never been able to discover, in person or conversation, anything that was either witty or attractive. In beauty, she was not to be compared with Nettie or Amelia; and as for her songs, which were so loudly encored, they were only *too* disgusting. She sang with entirely too much expression; her gesticulations were decidedly theatrical, and she had been foolishly flattered into believing herself a prima-donna. It was an unpardonable innovation upon the laws of society for a young lady, under any circumstances, to betray symptoms of emotion; and still less unbearable, when they beheld in the transgressor a giddy school-girl, confident and elate in the whirl of her first season. But, then, there was no accounting for the freaks of the sterner sex—their absurd tastes and silly infatuations; and after all, the poor dupes were to be pitied, and deserved their sincere commiseration for being so easily taken in."

They further declared that she was Quixotic and intrepid, and in their compassionate pity for the "poor dupes," these worthy ladies succeeded in bringing to light such a catalogue of imperfections as to discover in their victim an embodiment of all human frailties, a prodigy of shortcomings.

There was even yet another class of individuals who looked with scarcely less unfavorable eyes upon the fair offender; and as they constitute a sect largely predominant in every community, are too generally understood to need explanation here. They comprise a band of supercilious damsels, who are characterized by a tenacious affection for the high-back chairs and long sofas which are usually strung longitudinally around the dancing-rooms, and are avoided as measles or hydrophobia by the gayer portion of the assemblage. The occupants of these "reserved seats" are known by ill-natured people under the suggestive sobriquet of "wall-flowers;" we say "ill-natured people," and might rightly add sacrilegious too; for is it not sacrilege to laugh at, and make light of, the dispensations of Providence? Woman is so predisposed that she must have something to lean on. She is created with an affectionate, clinging disposition, that longs to twine its dainty tendrils about some stouter pillar. If, then, no masculine arm is tendered to bear the fragile burden, she flees for refuge to the friendly "wall;" and in a stately arm-chair, beneath its kindly shelter, her work is finished; her search is ended, for she has found a haven of rest. The class to which we allude never dance, and offer as a plea "conscientious scruples." Such being the case, they had much better have remained at home, it being highly improper to patronize and encourage by their presence an amusement, participation in which either their church or their conscience forbids. By and by some wicked urchin, whose juvenile curiosity dictates the *qui vive* of both eyes and ears, suggests as a more plausible reason, that they have not been invited; and the rumor is circulated, as the latest intelligence, by significant nods, winks and coughs. This may appear a little hard, and there are always some gentlemen present who are willing to play the agreeable, and do their duty by all parties; but when they compare the appalling phalanx with their own slender troops, they become dismayed by the inequality of forces; and fearing an evening's martyrdom without prospect of relief, they turn, like their companions, to

seek some more isolated fair. One of the most striking characteristics of the "wall-flower," is not only the desire, but the ability, to "behave." She vouchsafes no discourse with her companions in misfortune, lest others *might* suspect that she was not enjoying such perfect beatitude as the nonchalant air and languishing eyes are intended to portray. She never speaks except when some fugitive knight, in making a hasty exit, drops a passing compliment upon her "charming appearance this evening," upon occasion of which, she raises languidly her head and listens with a sigh! And so she sits and behaves, and behaves and sits, until the last carriage rolls away; and in recounting to her "dear mamma" the events of the evening, she vents her latent envy, stating, with unerring accuracy, not only the precise number of courting couples present, but the prospects also of each anxious suitor. She reviews, critically, the costume of each lady, never omitting a special mention of those attired in made-over silks or borrowed jewelry. "Miss A.'s hair was arranged *so* unbecomingly; and Miss B.! I only wish you could have seen her; she just looked a *perfect fright*." She becomes quite enthusiastic over Miss C.'s beau, whom she declares to be the "unadulterated essence of stupidity." "I declare!" she exclaims in genuine solicitude; "I don't see how she *can* tolerate the attentions of such a creature! He is *so* insipid that his mere presence would be, to *me*, perfectly intolerable."

Mark me, reader! whenever you see one of these lackadaisical maidens of doubtful attractions, whose thoughts are so occupied with her female friends that she is enabled to detail what each one wore, how each one looked, what each one said and did, you may set it down as an indubitable fact, that she has had little else to engage her attention.

Myra, meanwhile, blissfully unconscious of the envy and ill-nature which her popularity so generally excited, re-entered the field with cloudless brow and unbattered crest, accepting the homage of her subjects with an easy dignity that baffled the most prudish and malevolent of the estimable sisters. Lionel was frequently her escort upon such occasions, and no one enjoyed her triumph more than he.

Mr. Henry was spending the evening at Violet Bank a few days after the episode in which he figured so conspicuously in the last chapter, when Myra, struck with his unusual reticence and the

wistful look with which he now and then regarded her, readily perceived that some secret trouble had made war upon his placid humor. Even the tea bell failed to enliven; he was silent and preoccupied; ate little; sipped his coffee as though he no longer relished its aromatic savor; and blushed violently when Mrs. Marston asked if he would take a second cup. "A change had come o'er the spirit of his dream," the meaning of which she was at a loss to conjecture, until, encouraged by her kindness, he was led to unburden his mind in a full confession concerning his present unhappy state. He managed to make her understand (not without great trepidation, however) how his heart had been won by her beautiful friend; how his attachment had been growing daily since the first time he beheld her; how he believed that he never could be happy without her; how he trembled for the success of his suit, and how his whole future hung upon the present issue. "Would not Miss Marston intercede for him?"

His voice was low and broken, and the incoherent sentences, stammered forth at long intervals, were abruptly left off. His listener very politely overlooked the unrounded periods, and with a woman's tact, herself supplied the missing links of the touching recital.

His expression, as he sat gazing abstractedly into the smoldering embers, was ludicrously affecting, and Myra felt her own position to be by no means enviable; for while she knew nothing derogatory in regard to the young stranger, she felt that this was a matter in which she had no right to interfere. And supposing she had it in her power to grant his petition, she knew how ill-suited such a pair would be, and the consequences were not pleasant to think of. Not that she entertained fears for Florence, knowing, as she did, that one must be more personable than the present aspirant who could awaken a responsive thrill in her friend's romantic heart; on the contrary, she knew that her indifference bordered hard upon dislike, and that his misplaced affections could lead to nothing but annoyance to the one, wounded pride and blighted hopes to the other. She could but pity the unhappy victim, and fain would speak some word of comfort to cheer him in his lonely hour.

She explained to him that she could have no influence with her friend in such matters, and that his request would be equally un-

reasonable even were it otherwise; that this was an affair in which no one could help him, and advised him, as the surest way of putting an end to his suspense, to visit her at her home, and know his fate at once.

He followed her advice to the letter, and when he called, on his return, to deliver an answer to a note, of which he had been the bearer, there was no need for questions; she read his doom in the very look with which he greeted her—a species of dejection peculiarly characteristic of a defeated politician on the day after election.

He came in time to be more friendly and less reserved than heretofore, and seemed to look to this one, and only confidante of his disappointment to cicatrize the wound cleft by the fair archer. Myra did what she could to console him, and was gratified ere long to find his appetite gradually improving, which circumstance she welcomed as a precursor of his habitual tranquillity.

Lionel rated her upon the growing intimacy. "He will do well enough in his place," he said, "as an ordinary acquaintance; but believe me, Myra, he is unworthy of your friendship."

"I am sorry for him," she persisted. "He seems to be well disposed, and inclined to be friendly with me; if I can exert a good influence over him, can contribute to his pleasure or happiness, I see no reason why I should withhold it. We should make many allowances for him, Lionel; he has no sister, and doubtless feels awkward and embarrassed in our easy, informal society. Besides, I have an impression that his home life is not pleasant; every one can see that he is ill-treated, and intimidated by that big chuff of a brother."

"Friendly!" echoed the other, "and who would dare be otherwise? Who would not esteem it a privilege to be Miss Marston's friend? The gay, gifted and caressed, the child of wealth and luxury, the fondling of society and idol of her home. Of course he is your friend; but let poverty or misfortune overtake you, he would care as little for you as for the veriest pauper who ever plead for public charity. I have studied them carefully, and mark me, Myra, his brother is, if I mistake not, the better character of the two. He has at least one redeeming trait—he makes no attempt to conceal his real sentiments, and pretends to no higher aspirations than the accumulation of riches. But this

Henry aims at universal popularity. I have watched him in crowds, and have heard every subject you could mention discussed in his presence, but never yet have I the first time known him to express an opinion either for or against. He is neither fish nor fowl, but patiently awaits the popular voice, and follows in the wake. He is no less a worshiper of the 'almighty dollar' than his brother, but has too much policy to proclaim it to the world; he takes care never to commit himself for fear the current *might* change when too late to recant. The elder recognizes but one God; Henry bows to two. He has erected within his sanctuary a golden image; at its feet kneels a cringing figure, upon the brow of which is traced the gaudy superscription 'PUBLIC OPINION.' He fears to offend the awful deity, so prays without ceasing to the lesser, imploring her intercession, and offering up his orisons in the language of Ruth: 'Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee; for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.'"

"Fie! Lionel," cried his companion, in surprise; "you shock and astonish me. What a speech from the lips of a Christian philanthropist! A sentence so harsh is equally unlike and unworthy of you. His reticence arises from excessive modesty."

"Modesty, forsooth!"

"And to prove that your maturer judgment is, for once, at fault, only remember his recent attachment. Florence is not rich, I am sure; yet he loved her, nevertheless. How do you reconcile this contradictory circumstance with your estimate of his character?"

"Easily enough," was the calm reply. "If Miss Stillbury is not an heiress, Henry Sims is none the wiser. It was reported during her stay that her sire was vastly wealthy, as it is quite the fashion nowadays to claim for every stranger who visits distant friends, more especially if the fortunate party be a lady, not merely young and pretty, but beautiful and attractive. Her style of dress, to say nothing of the jewels she wore, seemed to confirm the rumor; and while I knew it to be false, deemed it not my duty to contradict it. Sims, no doubt, has heard the same, and since his capture is generally known, no one cares to undeceive him.

"No, no, my little friend, your motives are the best; I appre-

ciate and commend; but argue as you may, you cannot disprove my former assertion. He displays equal forethought, and emulates, in his daily life, the shipwrecked Hibernian who prayed one moment to Jehovah and the next to the devil, because 'Faith! and he couldn't tell whose hands he might fall into.'"

"Well! may be so," (so these contentions always ended); "I respect your opinions, but I can't think that you do him justice."

Mr. Rodolphus had, in the meantime, made little progress in his wooing. After a satisfactory test, finding, to his dismay, his last tactics decidedly the most injudicious he had yet adopted, he wheeled about, and from seeming hardly conscious of the mother's existence, became, not only attentive, but *very* attentive, studiously attentive. Indeed, so diligent were his efforts to remove any unfavorable impressions made upon that lady's mind by past errors, that it would have been difficult for a disinterested party to determine to which of the two he contemplated offering his heart and hand (the latter being something considerable). It was the beginning of February when he conceived the idea of disclosing to his dulcinea the tenor of his sentiments through a fitting emblem of his impassioned heart.

Next in consideration came the probable outlay. He turned it over in his mind, concluding with an ominous shake of the sandy locks and a shade of melancholy altogether new to him.

A happy expedient suggested itself. What could be more appropriate or effective than the touching lines of a tender acrostic, with love for its prompter and genius for its amanuensis? Strange he had not thought of this before! True, he had never attempted a poem, but he was sure it must be very simple, from the fact that he had once been quite intimate with a boy who wrote verse with the same facility as prose, and he was certain that he had as much sense as the gentleman in question, and could compete in this as in other attainments. Other people wrote poetry, why should not he?

Mr. Sims rejected the ancient proverb, "*Poeta nascitur, non fit.*" "Bosh! humbug!" Incased in his impenetrable *amour propre*, Mr. Rodolphus Sims was—in his estimation—without peer or parallel, and would show to advantage in any arena in which he chose to exercise his talents. Arming himself with paper

and standish, he sought the quiet of his own chamber, and betook him to his task.

As a prefatory step to this novel undertaking, he wrote the letters of the name in orthographic order, thus:

M
Y
R
A,—and viewed the result with critical complacency.

So far, so good; the skeleton was without fault. Now for the filling out.

"May this messenger of love—" he wrote with a fluency that would have done credit to the most gifted poet of olden days.

"Y——,"—a sudden halt.

"Y——, Y——,"—meditatively.

"Y——, Y——,"—he could get no further. His dictionary was brought out.

"Yacht—Yachting—Yam—Yankee—Yap—Yard,"—in a loud undertone, running through the columns commencing with Y,—and so on to the end of the list.

He was no better off than before. He could find nothing suited to his taste; the word he wanted was not there. "A stupid book."

"Y——, Y——,"—'twas no good; Pegasus had sprained his wing; he could not soar.

"Y——, Y——," desperately.

"Dog gone it!" muttered Mr. Sims, losing his temper; "what in the thunder made the girl go and have a *Y* in her name?"

"Y——, Y——," despairingly.

Pshaw! what a simpleton he was for bothering his head over such nonsense! His ideas were a little confused now; they would be clearer by and by. He had a whole week before him; he would sleep on it.

For five consecutive days he pondered in silent agony over his unfinished poem; but all to no purpose. It was evident beyond a doubt that he had never drank inspiration from the fount of Hippocrene, or otherwise caught the poetic afflatus. The longer he conned it, the further he got from the subject; and with head, heart and energy, all combined, he never advanced beyond the opening line. That fatal "Y" hung for aye, like leaden weights upon the wings of fancy. It stood firm and immutable like "a

great gulf fixed," beyond which all was a chaotic jumble of ideas without rhyme, and rhyme without ideas.

At last, worn out and disgusted, he threw to the winds this bootless scheme, and, with a heavy heart, sallied forth to choose a fitting substitute. He visited a number of shops, and was shown a collection as varied in beauty as in value. St. Valentine appeared before him in every guise—comic and sentimental, hearts, cupids and floral emblems in endless number and variety.

Wishing it to "finish the business," he selected one of the handsomest, and groaned in spirit as he gave in exchange a new, crisp bill to the smiling clerk, who was, by this time, quite familiar with Mr. Sims' little "eccentricities," and made a shrewd guess, in his own mind, as to the destination of the tender missive.

In his sanctum again! Another trouble still! "How in the mischief is she to know that *I* sent it?" soliloquized the unfortunate youth. "What if, after all, some other fellow should get the credit of it? Horrible! and *all* that money gone, too!"

Another happy idea! "What a lucky hit, to be sure! Keep your eyes open, Rodolphus, my boy! 'Necessity is the mother of invention.'"

His monogram was carefully traced in one corner of the ample envelope, and the stamp fitted neatly over it.

The auspicious day at length arrived, and scarcely waiting for mail hours to be well over—so impatient was he to learn the result of his experiment—he attired himself in his latest importation, and turned his steps in the same direction as that taken by his "messenger of love."

"Have you received any valentines?" asked Mr. Sims, after a few commonplace remarks.

"None at all," curtly.

"What!" exclaimed the astonished Sims; "none at all? Do you mean to tell me that you have not received a single valentine to-day? Not one?"

"Not one," was the phlegmatic rejoinder. "My friends have all failed to remember me, or else deemed it undignified to perpetuate a custom so perverted and abused."

"Impossible!" cried Mr. Rodolphus in alarm, too much mystified by her cool indifference and unblushing denial to find words

in which to express his astonishment. "Impossible, Miss Marston! impossible that *any one* should fail to remember *you*."

"True, nevertheless," absently; too bent upon showing her repugnance to notice any thing unusual in his manner or address.

Mr Sims was *distrait*. The brevity of his visit was the subject of much comment for several days afterwards, especially by Aunt Jemima, who "hoped de Lord her young mistis had sot that ar furrin boy back so fur dat he wouldn't be always a pokin' over thar at all kinds o' odd times, when any body wid half sense was bleeged to see dat didn't no body at de place hab no use fur him."

By the time he arrived at home, his passion had reached its acme, and he spent his ill-humor indiscriminately upon all with whom he came in contact. He retired to his room at an early hour, much to the relief of the rest of the family, and finally fell asleep amidst alternate execrations upon "that girl," and heart-rending lamentations over "his lost bill."

The elucidation of what Mr. Sims termed an "inexplicable enigma," was simple enough. Mrs. Fudge, the village postmistress, was a lady of an enquiring mind. Her father had remarked the same in childhood, and had purchased for her a book entitled "Enquire Within." She held in reverence his parental teachings, and had never forgotten the lessons of early days. Mr. Moses Fudge, the *soi-disant* postmaster, was a meek, unobtrusive man, who spent the greater portion of his life upon the downy couch of Somnus, and the residue in practicing humility. We say "*soi-disant* postmaster," since, through indolence and amiability, he had, in reality, long since sunk, to all intents and purposes, into an agreeable nonentity, the duties of his office having been unconsciously assumed by his active little partner, his name being now used, merely as a matter of form, in the signing or endorsement of official documents.

Mrs. Fudge had achieved her destiny, having attained the topmost round of conjugal felicity. What could be more desirable than to be keeper of a country postoffice? What position could offer a better opportunity for acquiring information, or a more extended range over which to disseminate the same? She was a small woman, remarkable for her deftness and industry, and notwithstanding, like "Willie's wife," "her nose and chin they threatened ither," the danger was not so imminent as to suspend

the operations of the busy little newsmonger between the projecting members. She was better posted upon the pecuniary obligations of its citizens and the love matches in prospective than any other lady in the village. She served up to her associates the daintiest dishes of *on dit*, to say nothing of the current items communicated to distant friends through the medium of postal cards, more especially if their promulgation would be in any way detrimental to the interest or standing of her more popular neighbors.

She had, upon the present occasion, been struck with the peculiar style of the package, and divining its contents, decided upon a closer inspection. To hold it over a basin of boiling water until the seal was thoroughly moist, was the work of a moment; then a delicate blade was called into requisition, and the end was accomplished. It was a nice process, but time and practice had rendered Mrs. Fudge entirely *au fait*, so that now she might indulge her curiosity *ad libitum*, without fear of detection.

The most gratifying scene in this interesting pantomime was about to be enacted, when the servant from Violet Bank called for the family mail. The half-sealed envelope was dexterously slipped into an open Testament lying conspicuously near, and delivered on the morrow, reported: "overlooked" on the day previous; a phrase fraught, in the present instance, with a deeper signification than the words—in their general acceptation—would imply.

Myra was somewhat surprised at its untimely reception. "Some far-off friend had perhaps remembered her."

She was lost in admiration of its beauty and elegance, and was wondering who might be the probable sender; she examined again the postmark and address. Her eyes fell at length upon the stamp, which appeared to have been slenderly put on, and considerably rubbed by its excursion in the post-bag. She picked it off absently—with no suspicion of there being anything behind it—when lo!

What wondrous vision meets her startled gaze to call forth that altered look of disappointment and disgust? Behold! the unfortunate monogram standing in bold relief against the tinted background.

It was beautiful, and it was costly; but every beauty, every

charm had fled in the eyes that loathed the donor. She laid the ill-fated valentine upon the glowing coals, which lay in heaps upon the hearth before her. The avidious flames danced and crackled over their æsthetic victim, queenly in her royal robes!

She wrestled with the destroyer, and as, in her dying struggle, she breathed hues more nondescript and brilliant, Myra watched the cremation with a feeling akin to satisfaction.

CHAPTER IX.

FENLAND HALL.

THE honey-bee once more sips nectar from the lily's cup, and hums a canty lay as busily he toils through all the day, to gather sweets while lasts the feast of summer roses.

It is at Fenland Hall, the home of merry, light-hearted Henrietta, that the three friends find themselves upon this balmy July eve. It is a delightful retreat; nothing lordly and imposing like Violet Bank, but a large and commodious, though simple structure, the very simplicity of which lends an additional charm. There is such exquisite harmony in the wide halls, latticed porches, and Venetian blinds—rivaling in tint the soft green sward, spread like a velvet carpet around it—and the little glade in which it stands, skirted by a shady grove of the forest's own. It is such a dear home-nest—so bright and cozy in its various appointments! The air is so fresh! the water so pure! and the childish feuds—that sometimes will arise among the juvenile members of the household—are tried and settled by the merciful arbiter, love.

Henrietta fills the important position of eldest sister in a family of five. Her considerate tenderness toward her widowed mother is prompted by filial devotion; toward her younger brothers and sisters she is the pattern of affectionate forbearance; while they, in turn, look upon "sister" as a matchless paragon of grace and goodness.

Myra and Florence had come down for what Henrietta insisted should be "a long visit." Two weeks of the allotted period had already glided by, and though they had intended remaining only through the present month, they had, by the anxious entreaties of

their cheery hostess and the earnest solicitations of the many acquaintances formed during their stay, been prevailed upon to protract it—at least another moon.

"True," argued the lively importuner, "our neighborhood is not so gay as B——, and doubtless seems distressingly dull to Florence after her winter in the city; but if you will only promise to do as I wish, every thing shall be done to make your visit a pleasant one. The nicest beaux the county can afford shall constitute your retinue; and you forget the picnics—and what not—in contemplation, to be given wholly in honor of the 'attractive strangers,' to say nothing of the approaching conference, which is, in itself, a most felicitous occasion."

"The fact is," she went on, "there is no telling what you might miss by leaving before this all important event. I have attended three of these church conventions in my life, and you have no idea what rare fun we do have. You see, the church is always crowded in the afternoon with the old members and delegates, so the younger portion of the congregation remain outside, eat ice cream, drink lemonade or soda-water, confabulate with the friends whom they have not seen for a year past, and have a gay time generally."

They sat to-night upon a long portico, running along the entrance hall. Visiting hours over, they were enjoying, without fear of intrusion, an old-time chat; they had not yet exhausted their budget of news, and each was called upon to give a graphic outline of her sayings and doings since last they met.

Henrietta was bantering Myra upon her supposed conquests, when she said playfully: "You should really be more careful, dear; and since you have grown to be such a belle, learn to dispense your favors less promiscuously and with more discretion, else you might unconsciously deal a fatal blow to the peace and happiness of more than one of our too susceptible youths. Above all, let me warn you especially to beware how you smile too sweetly upon Mr. Jerome; that is, unless you wish to wage war against the Amazons; and as the fight would be a death struggle on the opposite side, the engagement might prove a desperate one; so while I would not disparage either the virtues or ability of the young divine, yet, unless you prove yourself a more artful strategist than I think you, the trophy were scarcely worth the hazard."

"Fie! Henrietta," exclaimed her friend, laughingly, in pretended displeasure; "don't be absurd. From whence did you obtain this latest acquisition to your harp strings, whose vibrations you must deem peculiarly melodious, judging from the frequency with which you play upon it? Mr. Jerome cares nothing for me, at least, not more than for you or Florence, or any other young lady of his acquaintance."

"Very plausible indeed, but by no means conclusive, Miss Marston," retorted, with provoking good humor, the incorrigible teaser, whose relish for a joke was not a whit less now than in former days, when she used to play pranks on the professors at the Institute.

"We don't happen to be lineal descendants of that unfortunate sect who 'had eyes and saw not, and ears and heard not.' We live in a progressive age, and the two great essentials, apparently so neglected in olden times, form the leading features in the modern 'make-up.' It requires, by no means, a person of extraordinary discernment to discover that he adores you. Indeed! it is altogether quite romantic; unquestionably a case of love at first sight. I declare! I actually pitied him the other night when you sung that little Italian song he admires so extravagantly. His eyes really looked as though he would devour you; and I felt so sorry for him, poor fellow! because I *think* I know—that 'tis 'love's labor lost.'"

"Pray! who may be the belligerent damsels to whom you just now made such flattering allusion?" asked Florence listlessly, exchanging her chair for a seat upon the door-step, and leaning her head languidly upon the lap of Myra.

"Why, the Philipses, of course!" with a grimace and attitude of mock terror, that called forth irresistible cachinnations on the part of her companions.

"What other tribe in these benighted parts so deservedly merits the title as they? Don't you remember the two ladies I pointed out to you at church last Sunday, the elderly maiden with a dish face, and the younger with a pug nose, the complexion, eyes and hirsute appendage of each being of a light drab color? Their names are respectively, Misses Lydia and Janet Philips, the Alpha and Omega of the co-operative band. The sisters are eight in number, not one of whom has ever yet been

able to gain her own consent to leave the paternal roof-tree; and while it has been whispered by some, that a change of cognomen would not be held in such derision as circumstances might lead one to suppose, yet, it is only whispered, it being entirely optional with them, of course, that they still retain the name of their illustrious ancestors.

"They are gems in their way; public spirited to such a degree as to spare the county the expense of either newspaper or telegraph, since an event unknown to them in twenty-four hours after its occurrence, is unworthy of mention. Besides, they are greatly inclined to the romantic; allow their imaginations full play, and deal not unfrequently in the ideal. A breath of gossip, caught by their esurient ears, is like a grain of mustard seed lost in a fertile fen, or a spark thrown upon an arid prairie. One sister hears a bit of a rumor which sets her active brain to thinking, and closes her recital to another—with the confidential addendum—'she wonders if it is possible that thus and thus can be so!' The confidante of her suspicions, in communicating it to the next in order, 'wouldn't be at all surprised if it was so.' The third 'expects it is so,' while the fourth is ready to declare that 'it is so, to her own certain knowledge, and beyond the shadow of a doubt.' And so it goes, on and on, increasing regularly in geometrical progression, until by the time it arrives at the end of the line, the last narrator is furnished with a list of details, the recounting of which would require nothing less than an octavo volume.

"There's magic in the name; the very utterance of which awakens consternation in every timid breast. Lovers swear unalterable fidelity, farmers control their superstitious neighbors, and mothers lull their infants to slumber—all by the name of 'Philips.'

"They have a rigorously devout reverence for the church, which means—*their* church, and so they have instituted a consolidated coalition to lay siege to the little parson—that is to be—and take him prisoner by foul or fair; that is, they intend that the captive's name shall adorn Miss Janet's bulletin. Their combined energies have, for two years past, been directed to this end,—having been brought to acknowledge the wisdom of the old woman who asserted that 'a man was a convenient thing to have in a family,'—

and they are not likely to look with dove's eyes upon any one who threatens rivalry in that quarter, you may be sure.

"Miss Janet, being *only* twenty-six, is entirely too young to be allowed to enter society alone, so she is generally chaperoned by Miss Lydia, upon whom the 'dear child' relies with a childish *naïvete* that is truly affecting."

Mr. Jerome was a student of divinity who was spending his vacation with an uncle, residing a few miles from Fenland Hall. He expected to complete his theological course during the ensuing summer, and the frequency of his calls and his predilection for Myra, in particular, had been noticed and commented upon by others besides Henrietta.

They were a merry trio, and peals of girlish laughter echoed through the grove, like a chime of Christmas bells.

"That the tender romance of the confiding Janet may not end in a similar catastrophe as that of her charming sister, is 'a consummation devoutly to be wished,'" continued, with droll mimicry, the sprightly satirist, when their mirth had partially subsided.

"How? Which?" enquired her companions in a breath.

"Nay, nay, my friends; spare me the pain of so sad a recital, for the levity of the moment but ill befits the relation of so dire a tale."

"What? a romance?"

"Nothing less, my friends."

"Let's have it; give us a benefit," they demanded eagerly.

"Then tune your hearts to a more plaintive strain, and drop a tear for the unhappy Lydia."

"The romance! the romance! Miss Lydia's romance!" shouted her delighted auditors.

"Well! well!" sighed the laughing narrator; "if I must, I must. '*Vox populi, vox Dei*,' majority rules, so here goes. To maintain a proper consideration for the fitness of things, I must adapt my language to my theme; and the subject being antiquarian, will open my story with the ancient exordium—'Once upon a time.'

Miss Lydia's Romance.

"'Once upon a time'—that is, some years before the recollection of your humble contemporary—Miss Lydia Philips, having already

begun to traverse the shady paths of girlhood, had bowed in meek submission to the will of an all-wise Providence, and accepting the awful fiat without a murmur, had resigned herself to a life of celibacy, content to pursue her lonely walk, to follow the even tenor of her way. It was during this interesting era that, upon one ill-fated day, like a glad sun-burst upon a sky exhausted with long weeping, there appeared upon the scene one Mr. Dorson, a handsome, gallant youth, with soul as fresh as the sunny clime from whence he sprung.

"Oh welcome hour! thrice glorious advent! hailed by the desponding novice with transports only known among the angels, when chaos gives birth to the companion star of some isolated orb already started upon its immortal round through the trackless wastes of eternity."

"Hear her! hear her!" cried her animated listeners, drowning her voice in their deafening cheers.

"It was rumored," she resumed, recovering herself, "that he had been driven hither through 'disappointment in love,' having quarrelled with his betrothed, a cousin whom he had loved with all the blind devotion of young love's first dream. Dorson, though not of high birth, was well educated and engaging, and claimed the position for which nature designed him—in the first circles of our society. Piqued and unhappy, he wandered about, aimless and absent, vainly endeavoring to discover some balm with which to soothe his aching heart. He dashed headlong into gayety and dissipation, striving thus to drown his sorrow, but all to no purpose. At this critical juncture, ready to heal his wounds in a newer and less passionate love, man as he was, he could not long remain invulnerable to the delicate flattery and sympathetic tenderness of the accomplished worldling. He was handsome, ambitious and rich; she, though several years his senior and by no means pretty, aristocratic and attractive.

"He wooed and won his partial mistress, and the news was spread far and wide. The day had been fixed upon for the nuptials, and he had even gone so far as to solicit the daughter at the hands of her parents.

"'Take her, Dorson, and accept a mother's blessing. I have given you one of my costliest jewels, and you are the only man on earth into whose hands I would willingly consign my child,'

said the gracious 'mamma,' as she placed the hand of the blushing Lydia in that of the son-in-law elect.

"His former fiancee had, in the meantime, been among the last to hear of the intended alliance. It came upon her, startling in its abruptness, like a knell in the halls of merriment. She had toyed with her victim, merely to gratify a foolish vanity, confidently thinking, the first storm of passion over, to see him again trembling and pleading at her feet. Shocked and alarmed, and fearful lest she had wrecked her whole future happiness through folly and caprice, she immediately wrote a repentant letter, recalling her recreant lover.

"Poor Dorson! his position was indeed a pitiable one. His heart did not return to its old allegiance, since it could not *return* where it had never wavered. From that moment, slight glimmerings of his own heedless indiscretions began to dawn upon him. He recognized the hopelessness of his present situation in all its unmitigated bitterness; in a word, he awoke to life and himself. He was no longer able to cheat himself with a hollow name, an empty farce, a mere semblance of a passion, false and unreal.

"Was ever man so ill-beset before? Honor held him in her iron fetters, while love summoned him to the bonny land of his nativity. He became wild and reckless, resolving to loose his shackles and free himself at every hazard.

"He made the gaming table a place of frequent resort, played for high stakes, and lost. He made no attempt to conceal from his affianced the knowledge of his downward career, but seemed, on the contrary, rather to glory in his fall. She did not upbraid him as he had expected, but reasoned and expostulated. He pleaded pecuniary embarrassments and finally poverty, offering, with heroic magnanimity, to release her from an engagement made under more propitious auspices. She only chided him.

"'How little he understood her woman's heart! Was she not willing to sacrifice anything, everything, for the man she loved? Had she not rather dwell in a cottage with noble Gilbert than abide in a palace where he was not?'

"He visited her in spells of petulant inebriety: fair Lydia wept.

"Angry and desperate, he was on the eve of putting an end to a life that was more than wretched, when his suicidal intentions ended in a summary dismissal, by a fortunate alternative

that flashed upon him like a ray of inspiration. He remembered the ruling passion of our sex; the fatal legacy left us by our first mother, who has bequeathed to her daughters that ceaseless yearning for knowledge—knowledge, not less intense than that which stirred her ambitious soul, when she sat 'neath the bowers of Eden, and won by soft caresses her uxorious lord to her pomaceous feast.

"He made peace with his cousin without delay, and giving her reply to his tender *billet-doux* a suspiciously conspicuous position among the contents of his front pocket, hied him hence, to achieve a happy destiny.

"He had not been long in her presence, when her quick observation recognized in his correspondent a feminine scribe. She inquired the writer; he colored deeply. She asked to see it; he was covered with confusion. She asserted her claims with dignity, declaring that there should be no secrets between them, and that it was her manifest right to peruse it. His countenance assumed an aspect of alarm, as he swore that 'he had rather die than have its contents meet her eye.'

"Enough! he had applied the spark to tinder, and the conflagration was only a question of time. In playful reproachfulness, she seized the letter from its lurking place, and began to scan its pages; a scuffle ensued, in which Dorson made frantic efforts to recover the abstracted missive. A dozen lines were scarce got over, when the stricken maiden, with a piercing scream, sank fainting upon the sofa.

"The entire household came rushing to the rescue; the swooning nymph was deluged in ice water; camphor, hartshorn and *eau de Cologne* were applied to her olfactories in quick succession, and it was not until the contents of half a dozen gallipots had been well nigh exhausted that a restoration was wholly effected.

"When at length she opened her eyes to gaze upon her faithless lover, the apostate, alas! was out of ken. Turning to advantage the general confusion, he had taken French leave and absconded. Setting spurs to his nimble steed, he bounded away at Gilpin speed, never checking curb or rein till he found himself aboard the train bound for the home of his affections.

"When Miss Lydia read, a short time afterwards, a lengthy account of a brilliant marriage, in which Gilbert Dorson was the

happy groom, she could contain herself no longer. She wrote an anonymous letter, in which she dwelt chiefly upon his plebeian blood, adding: 'that she was surprised that Lydia Philips should ever have permitted his attentions.'

"Although it was posted from a distant town, an aunt of the bride, who is said to have been remarkable for her wit and talent, divined the author, and wrote a scathing reply, which blasted forever any lingering hopes of matrimony nurtured by the fair Lydia. Is it not a sad story?"

Henrietta's gayety was contagious. It was impossible to remain long in her cheerful society without feeling buoyed by her enlivening influence. Oscar was a frequent visitor, and it was not difficult to guess the cause of her joyousness. Happy Henrietta!

CHAPTER X.

COUNTRY PLEASURES.

'TWAS one of those ambrosial morns,
Of summer showers and sun-beams born;
Which e'en but now their hearts have blended,
And toward our earth their way have wended,
Till lighting o'er some limpid lake,
They pause—their bridal feast to take—
In the lower air suspended.
And as they sip the fragrant breeze
Redolent from southern seas,
They catch their shadows all aglow,
Mirrored in the lake below,
And 'raptured by their own love glances,
Flash o'er her in fantastic dances.
Vesper, in anticipation
Of the newly wedded pair,
Wishing some slight gift to send them
From the fields of upper air,
Had lent a crystal from his hoard
To garnish up the nuptial board,
Which, 'tracted by the rose's hue,
Had kissed her lips with honey-dew.

Such was the morn that hailed the "felicitous occasion," and as the rising sun dispelled the mist, the mazarine heavens were not more cloudless than the youthful faces of the merry party that left Fenland Hall at an unusually early hour. The convention was to be held at the county village, seven miles distant; and as "every one" would be there, seats would be in great demand; and as Oscar suggested, "could only be secured under penalty of semi-suffocation and an ocular bombardment for an hour before services began."

He was treated at the Hall very much as one of the family; he came and went at pleasure, and his sunny face and perpetual good-humor seemed here to have found their native element. His sayings were proverbial, and treasured as gems of wit by the trio of small individuals who always greeted him with a shout, followed hard upon his heels and tugged at his coat sleeve, soliciting his praises in behalf of the latest acquisition to the nursery paraphernalia. He mended Tommie's top, painted Bobbie's "express wagon," instructed Susie in the Parisian costumes then in vogue, worn by ladies of state—such as she esteemed her dolly, pinched Maud's ears, and mimicked what he teasingly termed her "grownish ways." He never appeared out of temper with anything or any body; never "borrowed trouble on interest," and lived strictly upon the principle that "sufficient for the day is the evil thereof." No more popular spirit was to be found in all that district. Ready and obliging, he was ever willing to sacrifice self for the accommodation of others; he never got into scrapes, since, like an expert fencer, he possessed the happy knack of meeting every ill-natured thrust from the enemy's foil with cool sarcasm or an annihilating jest. A social entertainment without "Maurice" was voted a failure; he was the life of every circle, and the "prince of good fellows" with all who knew him.

Myra would scarcely have recognized in this gay Adonis the dignified young gentleman with whom she had danced upon that memorable new year's eve. Their first few meetings over, he had thrown aside the mask of formality which he had worn at Violet Bank, and appeared in his true colors, the kind, warm-hearted and genial soul that he was.

A number of friends had come from adjacent counties, to be on hand when the assembly convened; and he, thoughtful

and considerate as usual, deemed it more prudent to make no engagement for himself, but having manifested not the slightest partiality for any one of the fair bevy, to wait and see which of the charming visitors would be left without an escort; in consequence of which, when the hour for departure arrived, he found two bashful Misses left upon his hands, who having just entered upon their teens, were coy and susceptible accordingly. He begged the honor of convoying them thither with the same deferential gallantry as though soliciting the hand of a Fifth Avenue belle; and on comparing notes on their return, they mutually agreed that "Mr. Maurice was the handsomest, most entertaining, and altogether the most fascinating young gentleman with whom they had ever met."

Mrs. Bryant did not accompany them, as the number of guests constantly coming and going necessitated her remaining at home; and Oscar, as she asserted, being the only one of the party whose rationality she could vouch for under all circumstances, she placed in his charge the edibles and other requisites for a sylvan banquet,—indispensable encumbrances, since they were not expected to return.

With the baskets, Maud (a fair-haired girl next in age to Henrietta) and the young ladies aforesaid, together with an allowance of corn which his provident brain had stowed in the phaeton box for his "team," he brought up the rear with what he termed "his ship load of general merchandise, comprising passengers, foreign importations, domestic wares and entertainment for man and beast."

He was playing the agreeable to the youthful coterie, when a solitary spire suddenly rose from a clump of trees a little in the distance.

"Behold the city!" he cried with a solemn flourish, to Myra, who was just ahead.

Looking in the direction indicated, she beheld the ruins of an apparently deserted village—if indeed, some half dozen tumbled-down buildings of indeterminate character, one or two store houses, a machine shop and eight or ten dwellings scattered indiscriminately over a red clay bank deserved the appellation.

She laughed more at the tone and expression than at the scene

before her. Her patriotic heart could not make sport of the poverty and downfall of her native state.

"Poor old Virginia!" she exclaimed with touching sadness.

"You view only the surburbs as yet, the city proper is further on," said Oscar with undiminished gravity.

"I can discover nothing beyond except the church."

"You mistake my meaning," he continued facetiously; "I mean that the city is still in prospective. It seems that the enterprising founders, having selected the picturesque site, designed building thereon a national metropolis, and the scheme being a novel one, proposed executing it in a novel way. Contrary to custom, therefore, they built the environs first, when the noble work was brought to an abrupt termination by the bugle notes of battle, scattering woe and destruction over our prosperous land."

Their arrival was none too early; the building was already packed to its utmost capacity; while horses, vehicles, men and boys formed an incongruous mass without. It was with difficulty that our party could gain the entrance; and once inside, having made a complete circuit of the aisles, was on the point of retiring in despair, when a couple of old gentlemen who occupied a seat near one of the narrow windows, made way for the feminine portion of the company. Their escorts, after seeing them comfortably seated, with many regrets at leaving their fair companions, sought the outskirts of the grove, where respiration was freer and conversation more rife.

The air was hot and close, despite the number of fans, which gave rise to a gentle current, wafting on its breezy wings stifling odors of rose-water, bay-rum, Bloom of Youth, and an unpleasant mingling of perfumes and cosmetics of sundry varieties. Ladies of all ages lined the benches, and the flutter of lace handkerchiefs, the rustle of crumpled silks, the audible whispers and smothered yawns kept up a perpetual buzz, resembling that of a swarm of bees dislodged from their mother hive; it being next to impossible for any one in that part of the congregation to catch much of the sermon, which to our young friends, whose morning drive through the fresh country atmosphere made their present position seem doubly cramped and unenjoyable, was striking in nothing save prolixity.

Young men, attracted by the *beaux yeux* of the fair prisoners, formed triple lines and hung in semi-circles about the doors and windows, instituting artful manœuvres by which to attract their attention; some of whom, being up in chirology, transferred speech to their dainty fingers, and in this mute language, carried on an engaging conversation; while others were equally intent upon a glove or handkerchief flirtation.

Glad to be at length dismissed, the girls from Fenland Hall, meeting their escorts upon the steps, fought their way bravely through the throng until they reached an open space large enough to spread their viands, for which the unusual excitement and fatigue had given them a keen relish. As Henrietta predicted, 'every one was there,' which meant, every one in that section who could get there; but to discover in that sea of human faces any single individual whom you particularly wished to see, was, as Oscar declared: "No less absurd than 'looking for a needle in a hay stack.'"

Feeling disinclined to a repetition of their morning's experience, they spent the afternoon without, where the number who crowded the church could scarcely be missed from the promiscuous multitude. The carriages were appropriated by select parties, while the less fortunate were content to take both sun and dust in open buggies or wagons. Old gentlemen stood about in squads, discussing crops and politics; while their sons strolled about the grounds with a passing compliment for every pretty group they stumbled upon.

Enterprising confectioners had located refreshment stands upon the spot, where cooling draughts might be had by the quantity; while the long lines constantly going to and from the denser portion of the wood, gave rise to the suspicion that its sequestered shades might screen the sale of a stronger beverage. The young people gave themselves up to the enjoyment of the hour; tickets to the coming ball were widely distributed, dances secured, and topics of a like nature freely discussed.

This was Wednesday, and the services were to be continued through the week.

The proceedings of the succeeding days were strictly in character with those of the first; the meeting adjourned Saturday after-

noon at an early hour, and the crowd dispersed; Mr. Jerome making one of the company who returned to Fenland Hall.

Tired and exhausted, the girls made no pause on their arrival, but proceeded straight to their rooms, where they might exchange their heavy draperies for those of a lighter texture, and get well rested before making their appearance for the evening.

Mrs. Bryant followed them laughing. "I have an agreeable surprise for you, Myra," she said at length.

"For me?" incredulously; "I like a pleasant surprise. Pray! what can it be?"

"There is a gentleman below stairs—from your neighborhood, I think—who called a few minutes ago, and enquired for 'Miss Marston.' I assured him that you would be back in a short while, so he has been making himself quite at home, while I entertained him to the best of my ability. I dare say he is one of your numerous admirers, who having grown impatient during your long absence, thought it best to come down and look after his own interest."

"It is Lionel! Some one is ill!" cried Myra in alarm, giving utterance to the first thought that naturally flashed upon her, while her cheek paled in suspense.

"Dispel your fears, my dear child," with provoking coolness; "it is not Mr. Harrison, I assure you, and your mother and father are both enjoying their usual health; at least, so says the stranger gentleman, who reports having seen them a day or two since."

"I can't imagine who it can possibly be," said Myra reflectively, regaining her composure. "I was not aware that I had made an impression so lasting. Please tell me."

"No, no," replied her laughing hostess; "I would not be guilty of so great an unkindness. To tell you his name, would be to rob the anticipated meeting of half its pleasure; but since he has come so far, you will of course put a few extra touches to your toilet in honor of the unexpected visit."

"Do tell us!" cried a dozen eager voices.

"Wait and see," returned Mrs. Bryant, obstinately, as with a tantalizing smile she quitted the apartment.

Curiosity in the dressing-rooms was at its height.

"Wear you white silk, Myra," suggested Henrietta, elate at the

prospect of a joke; "I think I shall don my canary satin and run against you."

"Nonsense, Henrietta!" she returned with equal gayety.

"She would look much sweeter in that figured muslin," said Florence drowsily, as she settled herself for a nap; "simplicity and individuality are the real secrets of elegant and artistic dress."

They entered the parlors at nightfall, when *mirabile dictu!* whom should they behold in the clare-obscure of the mellow lamplight but our old friend Rodolphus, radiant and perspiring, and serenely expectant!

It was indeed he; attired in his most sumptuous apparel. His identity was established beyond a doubt, for who could assume a similar pose! who could look, and speak, and dress, exactly as he did! and those remarkable hands and feet, and that notable watch chain could be the constituents of no other.

Mrs. Bryant was correct in her conclusions: Mr. Sims had grown impatient. He had waited until now, thinking each week to welcome the return of his "Bird of Paradise," as he was wont to term her, when love, alias Mammon, awakened the dormant sentiment of his sordid nature; but as his daily inquiries were met by the same unsatisfactory answer, he resolved to go at once, and ascertain by personal observation the cause of the protracted visit.

Truth to tell—he had felt greatly mortified and not a little wounded at the unfavorable reception of his valentine, but the first pangs of disappointment over, he found a panacea for his injuries by adverting to his former motto; and his inordinate vanity readily attributed her indifference to maidenly modesty, regarding her cruel slights as only an artifice by which to conceal her unquestionable admiration of his lovesome self. Yet strange to say, notwithstanding these comforting reflections, he had, nevertheless, never since that luckless day, been able to broach the subject ever uppermost in his thoughts. There was an inconvenient thickness about the windpipe, which rendered mere respiration laborious in the extreme, and his tongue refused to do his bidding when he found himself in her presence.

"No girl could fail to be touched by this last, undeniable proof of his affection," he had reasoned; and while the cost of the trip was weighed in detail, the stake was considerable, and was he

not certain of being amply reimbursed? Hence the present escapade.

He had, for an hour past, been playing "Innocence Abroad" to the company of fashionable dandies who looked upon him as the latest wonder; and who, willing to be amused, crowded about him, and marked his gestures and drank his words with an avidity only equalled by the country lad who, upon occasion of his first visit to the city, requested his "Pa" to show him the town, as he had seen nothing but houses.

Mr. Sims had borne his honors with characteristic complacency, and during the circumlocutory process of "drawing out" the stranger, "the stranger" had, by a series of well-tuned queries —the spontaneous out-growth of unsophisticated simplicity—succeeded in posting himself upon the pecuniary status of the community.

An angry light darted from the hazel eyes which a moment before had been dancing in mirth.

"What right had he, that tawdry jackanapes, to persist in his odious attentions? What authority had he for palming himself off upon society as *her* friend? And had he no self-esteem that he could thrust himself thus, uninvited, where he must know that his presence was intolerable?"

Acknowledging his greeting with a distant bow, queenly in its haughty grace, she sought the farther end of the apartment, where she was soon surrounded and monopolized by a suite of enthusiastic admirers.

Oscar took in the situation at a glance, and Henrietta shaded her eyes and bit her lips to suppress her merriment.

Mr. Sims blushed, mopped his forehead with a rose-colored bandana, and relapsing into silence, gave himself up to reflection.

Tea over, the evening had passed pleasantly enough, and Myra was congratulating herself upon her unexpected good-fortune in eluding any advances of her pertinacious lover, when she suddenly discovered that the parlors were well nigh deserted. Mr. Jerome had for some time held her attention over a portfolio of engravings, hence she had not remarked the exit of the several couples as they dropped out two and two, preferring the study of astronomy upon the front lawn to the more circumscribed limits of the drawing-room, and leaving Oscar, Mr. Sims, Jerome and herself the only occupants.

Mr. Sims had quietedly bided his time. Seizing upon the present opportunity for conversation, he crossed the room and seated himself by her side.

"You—ah!—ahem!—You have enjoyed your visit I suppose," he began, with great self-felicitation.

"The length of my stay would seem to warrant your supposition," without looking up.

"You—ah!—ahem!—Did you have a pleasant time at the conference?" emboldened by a happy estimate of his personal attractions.

"*Very*," pronounced emphatically, between the bars of a favorite opera, hummed under her breath.

"Did—ah!—Did any one take religion?" asked Mr. Sims with a bland smile.

No answer, except a puzzled look of surprise and amusement.

"'Twas not a takable occasion," observed Oscar with his usual sang-froid; "at least, that was not the object of the present meeting."

Mr. Sims spoke of religion as though it had been small-pox; which being the case, he must have been inoculated in early childhood and had the disease in its mildest form, since in after life he had suffered no ill effects from frequent exposure to the most infected districts.

"Won't you sing for me?" petitioned Jerome, coming to her relief.

A grateful smile answered this timely interposition.

"With pleasure," she said, as she rose and accompanied him to the piano.

Her clerical friend preferred the pathetic; and as her voice rose and fell with the plaintive strain, the gentle night winds, wooed by the magic minstrelsy, floated through the open windows, sporting with their spotless draperies; and kissing the breath of the fair enchantress, caught the wild refrain and bore away the soft vibrations—as uncertain as the sigh of some half-assured pilgrim, as he stands in trembling ecstasy upon the borders of the spirit-land.

Song followed song—as the star-gazers, returning from their promenade, pressed about her, begging, each, for his favorite—to the unspeakable dissappointment and chagrin of the infatuated Sims, he being thus debarred any further enjoyment of her society.

CHAPTER XI.

TRUE HEROISM.

MYRA and Oscar had grown to be stanch friends during her visit. Having formed a high estimate of his character upon their first meeting, she was more and more favorably impressed, as each day of their acquaintance revealed some fresh instance of his magnanimity and sterling worth, while he, on the other hand, desired no other evidence of her superexcellence than the fact that she possessed the warmest love and confidence of his adored Henrietta. True, Oscar liked everybody, but there was that in his deportment toward herself that said, she was second to but one in his esteem. She had laid the foundation of a firm and lasting friendship, based upon that deep respect which her remarkable profundity and high-bred mien never failed to awaken in the minds of her associates.

But notwithstanding the depth of their mutual regard, there was another youthful memory upon the tablets of which, he had, unintentionally, stamped a more fatal impress. Young, handsome and genial, he was well calculated to inspire with admiration a less susceptible heart than that of the voluntary victim, who having cast peace and happiness upon the die, had sworn within herself to gain his love by foul or fair. If Florence had ever suspected his betrothal, no one was the wiser for it: Henrietta had never told her, perhaps, because she had never asked her confidence. Be that as it may, she had very prudently kept to herself any conjectures she may have entertained upon the subject, and her last mental resolve had been, "I *will* win him, *coute qu'il coute.*"

Myra reached home in high spirits, all unmindful of the trials in store for her.

Lionel made one of the little home circle upon the ensuing evening, and for the first time in her life she felt embarrassed in his presence. What her sensations were, she could neither understand nor describe; but certain it was, they were different from any she had ever before experienced.

"Was his manner changed, or was it only an exaggeration of her too lively imagination?

"Was he not more silent and abstracted than was his wont? And when he spoke, was it not in tones strangely low and uncertain, when compared with the free-and-easy style in which he usually addressed her?

"When he questioned her about the particulars of her visit, was it not natural that he should manifest a special interest in the scenes in which she had been an active participant? and would it not have been an irremissible breach of etiquette, setting aside their intimate friendship, if, after two months' separation, he had not told her how he had missed the enlivening society of his little friend, and how lonely he had been during her absence?

"What then was the meaning of this singular uneasiness? What chimera had taken possession of her, that she was haunted by this vague dread of something unpleasant, she knew not what?

"Had he said or done aught to offend? Most certainly no; on the contrary, he appeared even more kind and considerate than usual; studied her pleasure and anticipated her wishes.

"Was there anything repellent in her manner toward him? Was it her own quiet dignity that held him at a distance? If not these, what *could* have erected this barrier of formality between them?

"Pshaw! what a silly fancy! how unfounded and unworthy of her! Lionel was the same; her childhood's friend, unchanged and true. The fault was in herself and no other: she was feeling dull and out of spirits, and imagined others equally unapproachable. Such fantasies were weak and irrational: she would dissolve the spell."

She essayed to rid herself of such depressing imaginings, and thought to beguile him of his abstraction by playful raillery. He checked her forced gayety by reminding her that she was no longer a child: she felt wounded and annoyed, and doubly uncomfortable throughout the remainder of the evening.

He requested her to ride with him on the morrow; she granted a reluctant consent: a pained expression overspread his noble features; her quick eye caught the injured air, and she sought to offer an *amende* for her unkindness by a more gracious concession at parting. The promise, however, was hardly given when she

would have revoked it, could she conscientiously have framed a plausible excuse for doing so.

The youthful emotions, how incomprehensible! and the sensitive mind, what a tissue of inconsistencies! How she invoked the god of storms to send wind or rain! how she wished for some happy intervention—even a slight illness—if, by that means, she might escape the dreaded ordeal. And when at length she fell asleep upon a dewy pillow, it was only to find the phantasms of dream-land even more distressing than those of her waking hours. She awoke from an uneasy slumber when wee bright visitants from the blushing Orient peeped through her casement and summoned her from her couch.

He was punctual to the minute, and six o'clock saw them seated for their drive.

They returned at dusk; and though the halls had not been lighted, in the swollen eyes and crimson cheeks lingered undeniable traces of recent tears, distinctly visible in the deepening twilight.

Lionel wore a countenance scarcely less woe-begone, and to the ineffable astonishment of the entire household, met Mr. Marston's pressing invitation to tea with a positive refusal, declaring that his business was such as to demand his immediate presence in B——, and turning the heads of his thoroughbreds in the direction of home, sped down the road at a rapid pace.

Myra repaired to her room, and left untasted the toast and coffee which Aunt Jemima brought up to her. The aged Abigail was nonplused; disinterested love for the "poor chile" rendered an expostulation imperative. Myra listened awhile in silence, but cut her remonstrances abruptly short by evincing a decided disinclination to talk. The venerable domestic withdrew, and to shirk enquiry and explanations, she extinguished her light and feigned sleep when her mother looked in a few minutes later.

Unhappy girl! what had she done that this pitiless shaft must be hurled so unexpectedly into her bright young life! Childish disappointments and school troubles sunk into insignificance, and were engulfed in her present sorrow.

But oh! how simple she must have been, not to have guessed long months before the light in which he regarded her! and how blind not to have foreseen the inevitable consequence of their unreserved intimacy!

She knew that her person was admired and her society courted. She had seen men bow in adulation before her, while she remained cool and unimpressible, accepting their homage as her lawful tribute, her woman's just immunity! But this! great heavens!

Oh! the unspeakable anguish it costs a tender, sympathetic heart to be constrained to listen to the broken story of a strong man's love! To hear the painful recital from one who has loved her from infancy, laid heart and soul upon the altar of this one idol, lived, hoped and labored for no other meed, until the subtile tendrils of mind and spirit have twined themselves indissolubly about the worshipped image, loved as only such a nature can! And while he would haste to claim the guerdon of his loyalty, yet bids his thirsting heart be still, and nobly waits, lest conscience should dictate a happier choice for the woman he would die to win. And when he has silently endured the pangs of postponement, watched the suitors come and go, feeding in solitude upon beatific visions of an ideal future, scenes in which his hungry imagination ever likes to revel, until after biding a fitting season, and finding the idolized object still unshackled, his heart give an exultant bound, and daring to hope for a consummation of his wildest dreams, throws himself at her feet and pleads as though life instead of happiness depended upon the issue; after he has exhausted his catalogue of vows and endearments, losing sense and reason in his passionate appeal; oh the effort to force her lips to utter the cruel, crushing words! to say in accents cold and staid: "My heart gives no responsive throb; I know not the sentiments of which you speak. I have nothing to offer in return but friendship and esteem?"

How he writhes under the demolition of his pictured Eden, ruthlessly shattered by the one being who could render existence a noon-tide of bliss, and without whom life were a stagnant pool, upon whose vapid surface he would float like a withered autumn leaf, aimless in love, hope and ambition! How, in the first agonizing moments of his bitter disappointment, he scorns the proffered boon, hugs his grief with a selfish tenacity, and feels a wicked delight in trampling upon the few remaining flowerets left blooming by his pathway! How in the ravings of despair he exaggerates his sorrow, uttering involuntary execrations upon the innocent author of his ruin, until time, like an angel of healing, administers

balm to the bruised heart, toning down his too ardent love, until it subsides into a quiet and tender affection!

Myra entered the breakfast-room pale and preoccupied, as though she had spent a sleepless night. No one questioned her of the previous evening: her father looked grave, her mother annoyed, and their one fair child was truly wretched.

Days came and went; long, dreary days in which she watched and waited, but waited in vain. A week dragged slowly by, still Lionel did not appear. Oh how she missed his pleasant companionship! How she reproached and hated herself!

She was strolling upon the terrace late one afternoon, restless and dissatisfied, when her father joined her and requested her to accompany him in his walk. She followed him in silence; he led the way to her favorite willow, and drawing her upon his lap, stroked her curls caressingly.

"I have a Christmas story for my little girl," he said with playful fondness.

"It is not Christmas, father."

"Ay, true; but a Christmas story nevertheless."

She bent her head, and casting her dark eyes upon the mossy velvet at their feet, listened with respectful attention to

Mr. Marston's Story.

"It has been more than twenty years ago," he began with evident emotion, "and yet," he added musingly, "as memory leaps the interval, how vividly those old days come back to me! those cherished scenes of early manhood, blooming in retrospect like never-fading passion-flowers along the brinks of time!"

Rallying from his brief soliloquy, he continued: "There were once two lads of noble birth, totally unlike in character and disposition—one country-born, the other city-reared; the former wild and impetuous, the latter thoughtful and reserved. They met at our proud old University, and these contrary spirits, seeming at once drawn toward each other, as if by magnetism, linked their youthful hearts in a deathless friendship—a friendship so pure and true that no trials nor vicissitudes of after-life could rend the sacred tie. Here they finished their collegiate career, and the country lad, an only scion of his ancient race, was made thrice happy a few months later, when, driven from the city by declin-

ing health, the father of his much loved friend took up his residence near the orphan's cheerless home.

"Then followed weeks of delightful companionship, for they were seldom separated. Brothers could not have been more sincerely attached, and days spent in idle dreams and youthful vagaries flitted by, until spring merged into summer, enticing them to livelier haunts. They were both to celebrate their majority within the month, and pining for a plunge in the sea of gayeties before entering upon the duties and responsibilities of manhood, they chose as their destination the gay White Sulphur, and August saw them among the many votaries who thronged the fashionable resort.

"Here they met a lovely, gentle girl, an early playmate of the city lad, and of whom his friend had often heard him speak in terms of affectionate regard. He hastened to make them known to each other, and in answer to what was intended as a formal introduction, she extended a snowy hand, and with artless cordiality, declared herself ready to welcome any one who was honored with the confidence of her old play-fellow. Fascinating and beautiful, it could not be wondered that anxious suitors crowded thick and fast about her—'the belle of the season' in common parlance, and certainly I never knew another of whom it might be more justly said. Ignoring, however, the many suppliants for her preference, she turned, surfeited and disgusted, from the artificial surface life upon which she was drifting, making no effort to disguise her partiality for the society of the favored pair, in the current of whose friendship she discovered a more genuine ripple.

"This fair young creature had laid siege to the orphan's heart, which bounded alternately with wild, indefinite hopes, only to be lost in an ocean of doubts, when he remembered that his friend, perchance, might hold a prior claim; which being true, as dear as she had grown to him, he would have torn the bleeding member from his bosom and trampled it in the dust, sooner than have proved a traitor to the noble comrade who loved him as a brother. He longed to question him, but pride seared the words upon his lips; he would not force a confidence that was not voluntarily bestowed. Haunted by this suspicion, he watched them narrowly, jealously; but his searching eyes could discover

nothing beneath the impervious mask save friendship, and that alone.

"They returned home after six weeks of unremitting gayety, and the dutiful son, finding his father's health sufficiently restored, proceeded at once to a Northern city, where he might prosecute the study of his chosen profession, leaving his less fortunate friend in a most unenviable frame of mind.

"Left thus to himself, this love-stricken youth gave himself up to business, resolving to forget; but the resolution was no sooner formed than broken. He could not forget; waking or sleeping, that one fair face was ever before him, and her lightest words were *phonographed* upon his memory.

"It was late in December, when, driven by an irresistible impulse, he sought her home; but the grand monuments and stately edifices of the far-famed city, were all unseen by the eyes that could espy one only mansion, where dwelt the queen before whose throne he proudly knelt and begged to claim allegiance. The winter's blast wailed through the streets and the snow fell in blinding sheets, obstructing vehicles and causing frequent collisions with the hurrying pedestrians, who jostled each other upon the side-walk; but the warring elements were unheeded and forgotten in that peaceful haven, the lover's Paradise! The genial warmth, the soft light, the art gems that met his gaze on every hand, the flowering exotics, the little canary, which twittered cheerily from its costly prison, and the general air of taste and luxury, were dangerous surroundings in that tender hour. But oh! the thrill of rapture that shook his being as he listened, eager and breathless, to the half-uttered confession, from the lips of the lovely creature before him, and the timid promise to cast her lot with his and share his fate in weal or woe!

"He reached home, he knew not how. He seemed bounding through the air upon an enchanted horse, and, despite the wind and sleet, the sun appeared to shine with ten-fold brightness, and the frosty air was as balmy as the breath of May. His bachelor establishment was metamorphosed into a royal palace, and the furniture and domestics into gallant courtiers, who would offer continual homage to his queen.

"'Twas Christmas eve, when settling himself to peace and

quiet, he succeeded in collecting enough of his wandering ideas to write his friend a long and somewhat incoherent epistle, in which he recounted his tale of love, endeavoring, in a measure, to portray the happiness he had won; at the same time begging forgiveness for his former reticence, and adding, 'that it wanted only his approval of his choice to render his felicity complete.' It was duly sealed and posted, and he grew impatient when he reflected that a week must elapse before he could expect a reply.

"Calling at the office the following evening, two letters were handed him, and recognizing in the inscription on the daintier envelope the hand of his *fiancee*, he slipped the other in his pocket, without according it so much as a cursory glance. Every word in the brief missive was read, re-read and digested; and he was on the point of retiring, when he suddenly remembered the other, which still remained unopened. Breaking the seal, he scanned it hastily; chiding himself, meanwhile, for his selfishness in forgetting thus his old friend, for the writer was no other.

"'Love is like Bermuda grass,' exclaimed the young planter, oracularly; 'a seed once sown can never be exterminated; and how soon it chokes out the less vigorous growth by which it is surrounded!'

"He read one—two—three pages, without being able to arrive at any definite conclusion upon any subject. He wrote upon general topics,—such as his studies, business and social pursuits, future prospects, etc.; but take it all in all, it sounded strangely cramped and obscure, certain passages seeming to imply a deeper meaning than the mere common places upon which he dwelt. He was absorbed in the perusal of the last page ere he could penetrate its ambiguity, which, like a woman's postscript, comprised the *real* signification of the preceding paragraphs.

"'I expect to be at home some time during the coming month,' it ran; 'and just here, my dear friend, I have to beg your forgiveness for concealing so long from you the only secret which I have never permitted you to share. You remember the fair girl we met last summer, in the sunlight of whose eyes I basked for the happy six weeks we spent together! What suspicions may have been roused within you then, I know not; suffice it to say, I have loved her since earliest childhood, and not more devotedly

now, than when, at seven years of age, with a dozen others of like precocity, I rode at a child's tournament, upon a stick horse, and crowned her 'queen of love and beauty.' I remember, as though it were yesterday, the exact color and pattern of the dress she wore, and how like a *real* knight I felt, as I fastened the simple wreath of daisies and tiny rose buds among her golden curls!

"'No syllable has ever yet escaped my lips to betray the dormant passion which has slumbered so long within me; but I feel instinctively that she cares for me, and have had to battle bravely with my own heart to preserve my secret, when I have sometimes imagined a difference in her manner toward myself and the conceited popinjays who registered their names in her list of admirers. You will doubtless think me strangely dilatory and indifferent, and had I been impulsive, like yourself, should have been more precipitate; but I was too proud to mention my hopes until I was sure of earning a name which she would never be ashamed to share. Success seems now within my grasp, for I have every reason to expect, with time and study, to rise to eminence in my profession; and should I ever attain that degree of distinction for which I strive, I shall feel that I owe it all to her; for it was the inspiration of my boyhood's dream that has spurred ambition and quickened my energies. I feel that it needs only a promise from herself to make me adequate to every exigency; shall visit her on my way home and learn my fate, whate'er it be. I tremble when I reflect that after all, I may have been cheating myself with a hollow fancy, and lost by my long delay the prize I ever hoped to win; but I banish from my mind all such unwelcome thoughts, and will not anticipate a disappointment, the very possibility of which were maddening.'

"He read no more. Crushing the sheet in his icy clasp, he leaned against the mantel for support, while a nameless feeling of wretchedness and self-abhorrence pierced his inmost soul.

"'Oh, why must this drop of untempered bitterness imbue his cup of bliss!'

"How he reproached himself for his silence! How like a thief he felt! How like a thief and a traitor, as he recalled the inditement of his own happy letter, every word of which would be as a poisoned barb in the heart of his injured friend! How days

were as months while awaiting its reply! and how he longed for the assurance that he was not utterly despised, and that his supplanted rival had some hope to sustain him under the blow his hand had dealt!

"It came at last—brief, yet generous and forgiving. 'Pardon me for not writing sooner to offer my congratulations,' it said; 'but I could not act a lie and pen a sentiment which my conscience did not sanction. The intelligence contained in your last came upon me like a thunderbolt, so crushing was its abruptness. For a moment it stunned, and in the next there arose within me a horrible envy, for which I hated myself the instant reason had resumed its sway. The exact nature of my feelings toward you, when at last I comprehended the import of the mute characters which sung a requiem to my long-cherished hopes, I will not attempt to describe. But enough! I have waged a fearful warfare with my own heart, and have vanquished the enemy, have conquered self!

"'I can now see how ungenerous and unjust it were to harbor such sentiments; can realize that it were better so. You are more calculated to win a woman's love and can render her life brighter and happier than I. Your letter teaches me the fallacy of my dream, and since my doom was inevitable, better to have heard it from your lips than her's! Thank heaven! she has never suspected the depth of my attachment and was spared the trial of giving me pain! I cannot reproach you for withholding your confidence, since I have been equally blamable.

"'The draught was bitter, but I have drunk it to the lees; and now, if the sincere and full assurance of my heart's best wishes for your welfare can add aught to your happiness, accept a brother's blessing. I shall never fail to remember in my prayers the two beings whom I shall ever after regard with fraternal affection.'

"The words were simple enough, but the accepted lover well knew the pang their writing cost him. The projected visit was postponed, with a promise to attend the nuptials, which were to be celebrated with the coming spring. A week before the day appointed however, a letter, accompanying his bridal gift, was received, in which he apologized for his absence, offering as a plea,

'That he had been suddenly seized with the mania for Eastern travel, and would embark for Europe in a few days.'

"Three years rolled by, in which his whereabouts were unknown outside of his immediate family, his friends losing sight of him, except what they could glean from foreign journals, where his name was frequently seen in the list of American tourists.

"Suddenly he was summoned to the bedside of his dying father, and from that hour, forsook the road to fame and fortune, devoting his life to the comfort and pleasure of his widowed mother. He was greatly changed, older and sadder, as though some secret sorrow had weighed heavily upon him; but he had made no idle boast when he declared that 'he had conquered self.'

"Again he sought the enlivening society of his old friend, and the happy father, placing in his arms a laughing babe, a fairer type of its young mother, exclaimed with impetuous magnanimity, 'I stole your first love, but you shall have my child! I will teach her to love and revere you, and should she live to be a woman, will consign her to your keeping. Let this be my voucher for the esteem in which I hold you!'

"The strong man was moved to tears, and kissed the chubby infant to cover his emotion.

"He grew strangely fond of the cheery wee one, petted and caressed her, and found a source of unending delight in watching her childish gambols; but ere two years had passed, the young wife being smitten by the hand of disease, the anxious husband hastened to try the effects of other climes, so that, on their return, he recognized in the little girl with whom he had parted ten years before, a child no longer, but a tricksy Miss of thirteen summers. His manner, though adapted to the new phase in which he found her, was undiminished in tenderness; and while he strove to fill the place of a brother, he well knew that his affection was not that bestowed upon a sister.

"He watched, with increasing pride and admiration the vivacious school girl as she ripened into womanhood; and the heart untimely blighted, warmed into life by her youthful companionship, began to put forth fresh germs, which, flourishing in the sunshine of her presence, burst into a delicate and sensitive blossom, and he loved with an abandonment of every other thought and sentiment—more consuming in its intensity than the

passion which had inspired the noblest aspirations of youth and manhood. Again was imagination launched upon an impenetrable future, lured by that treacherous beacon, the star of hope! Again he dreamed of love and blessedness that might yet be his!

"Noble and generous, he would scorn to take advantage of her youth and inexperience by beguiling her into a promise which she might possibly repent with maturer years; hence he waits; lets her view the world in its holiday vestments; lets her feast upon adulation until pampered with its sweetness; and when at last he stakes his all upon the significance of a word, she sends him from her, with nothing to hope for, nothing to strive for, consigning him to a life of despondency, down whose gloomy walks he must wander aimless and alone!

"What think you of the sentence? Think you not his a hard fate?"

Myra had hid her face upon his shoulder, and was sobbing audibly; for while their versions differed, she could not fail to recognize the story as the same which Lionel had recited on the evening of their drive. She had listened to it then for the first time, and in her struggle with the dictates of conscience and a hyperbolical sense of her own unhappy part in the tragic life drama, her sensitive heart had been swelled well nigh to bursting.

"Oh, father!" she cried, reproachfully, giving utterance to her long pent emotions. "You are cruel and unjust; indeed you are! I *do* love Lionel, very, very dearly; but I cannot regard him in the light he would have me. I feel toward him very much as I do toward yourself, and recognize in him the embodiment of the kind and devoted brother so often pictured in childish fancy. I cannot reward his fidelity with such a love as he deserves at the hands of the woman he would call his wife; and yet," she added, brokenly, "if you *really* wish it, I will fulfil your promise; but oh, father! you little know what you ask!"

"Never!" exclaimed the doting parent, in passionate tenderness, clasping her closer to his bosom. "Never while I live! My friend is dear, but my child is dearer! Never shall she be offered as a sacrifice by the father who adores her!"

"Dry your tears, little one," he said, composedly, after a brief silence, "the dew is falling, and 'mother' will be at a loss to account for our absence. Do not allow what you have heard this

evening to prey upon your peace; you have no cause to reproach yourself. We cannot control the workings of destiny; and," he continued, comfortingly, "it may be for the best after all; who can assert the contrary?"

"Where is he, father?" enquired the weeping girl, when she could command her voice sufficiently for the query.

"Who, Pet?"

"Lionel."

"Oh! he has not gone far," he replied, with a smile, provoked by the anxiety depicted in her youthful countenance. "He had a business call down the country a few days since,—something in reference to settling up an old estate, about which there appears to have been some quibble, I don't know what. He will return ere long, when his mind, I trust, will have acquired a more cheerful tone than that betrayed on the eve of departure, the day upon which he apprised me of his rejection."

"I think, Mary, that a change of scene would be an advantage to our child," he remarked to his wife, a week later, when Myra seemed still suffering under an unusual depression of spirits. "I am compelled to take a trip South this fall; suppose you and she accompany me."

"I was just on the point of offering a similar suggestion," replied his consort, with evident pleasure, gratified that he should have anticipated her proposition.

It was now the middle of September, and they were to start early in October. Myra received in the interim a long letter from Henrietta, one paragraph of which elicited an exclamation of surprise.

"I have great news to tell you!" wrote the merry scribe. "Oscar left yesterday for Lexington. A lucrative position, in the house with which Mr. Stillbury is connected, was tendered him, and he could not be so blind to his own interest as to refuse its acceptance. Was it not kind of Florence to think of him? for of course it was through her influence that the situation was obtained. I hated dreadfully to think of his going so far, but he promised to write very often, and I have become reconciled to the parting, since it will tend to his advancement. I trust that the term of separation may not be long, for I dare say he will make

his fortune in a few years, and then ——." Here the sentence came to an abrupt terminus, ending in a long dash.

It was not until the day before that fixed upon for their departure that Lionel made his appearance again among them. He looked quite himself, pleasant and entertaining as usual; and Myra felt greatly relieved in noting the fortitude with which he bore his disappointment. He expressed many regrets at losing their pleasant society, but beyond these, no word or act betokened perturbation or discontent.

"He must have a song before bidding them good-night," he said, leading the way to the drawing-room, "since it would be several months ere he could hope to enjoy a similar treat."

She could not deny the simple request, but the purpose for which they came was forgotten by each the moment they were alone.

"Myra," he said, earnestly, taking her hand kindly in his own, "I wish to beg your forgiveness for the pain I so unwittingly occasioned you. It was selfish and unkind to ask the boon for which I pleaded. I shall never wound you by its repetition, nor would I accept the sacrifice were it laid at my feet a voluntary offering. Forget my hasty, passionate words, and believe me henceforth the loving brother you have ever regarded me. I shall strive to prove myself worthy of the name, with only one stipulation—that I am granted a brother's privilege. I have not asked it before, when I cherished hopes of a dearer tie. Kiss me, sister! let this be our pledge."

A thick mist obscured her sight, but as his lips pressed hers, (for the first time in many years), a heavy weight seemed lifted from her heart, and in its place there came a feeling she could not define—admiration for this heroic spirit, who, ignoring self, had learned to live and labor for others.

The night was far spent, and it 'twas only the stars that gazed silently upon him as he wrestled with his secret sorrow.

"Oh God?" he cried, in bitter anguish, "why hast Thou tried me thus! Help me to bear! oh help me to bear! Give me strength to endure to the uttermost!" And as the prayer died upon his lips, his countenance was lit with a nobler beauty—THE BEAUTY OF SELF-CONQUEST.

CHAPTER XII.

FROM THE CLASP OF AZRAEL.

'TWAS moonlight on the water, and a solemn stillness reigned through the dusky corridors of a slumbering world. No unwelcome discord intruded upon Nature's reverie, and not a sound was heard along the stream except its own sullen murmur, and a low gurgle, as now and then a huge fish or alligator crossed the steamer's track, leaving in its wake a silvery ripple, widening until lost in the dancing shadows.

The broad bosom of the Mississippi lay before them, grand, gloomy and beautiful! along whose banks lofty cypress trees ranged their stately forms, like weird sentinels in the alternate light and shade of the shifting moonbeams; while from their overhanging branches trailed a mossy drapery, whose inverted transcript sported, like phantoms, o'er the polished mirror.

There was a wild, fantastic beauty in the scene, relieved of its monotony as an occasional cottage and waving cotton-fields glimmered faintly in the distance. An unexpected apparition completes the picture, as a lonely crane or heron unfurls its pinions and wings its silent flight, like some white-robed spectre of upper air.

But hark! a tender melody floats out upon the night,—the soft notes of a guitar and a voice so sweetly blended, that it might have been a siren's song, when, as of old, she woke the melting echoes of her mystic shell. Passengers, strolling lazily about the deck, attracted by the music, paused one by one, until a circle was formed about the pretty minstrel.

"Hist!" cried Myra, with a start, "I thought I heard a human voice, like some one in distress."

"You heard the alligators," remarked the captain jocosely. "Really, Miss Marston, we cannot suffer it," as she would have laid the instrument aside. "We too heard a human voice, although some of the young gentlemen present might question the truth of my assertion, and if distress could inspire such notes, I, at least, should insist upon instituting a system of torture for more than one fair vocalist."

The captain had already turned the corner of middle age, and though the cares of husband and father had long been his, he had not forgotten the gallantry of earlier days and the art of making himself agreeable, which had rendered his steamer one of the most popular on the line, and won for him a large share of public patronage.

She took up the severed strain somewhat reluctantly, but air and accompaniment ceased simultaneously at the second line.

"See!" she cried excitedly, pointing to an object a little in the distance.

All eyes followed hers, where the figure of a man was distinctly visible against the turbid waters, as he clung with tenacious grasp to an over-turned "dug-out," struggling desperately with the waves in his frantic efforts at resistance.

What a study to watch their varied countenances as they gaze upon the heart-rending spectacle! Horror is plainly depicted in the faces of those whose eyes are strangers to death and suffering; while others, more familiar with scenes of pain and wretchedness, look quietly on, unmoved by the frozen pity that congeals their nobler impulses. Not that these were by nature callous, but owe their induration rather to the schooling of the rude outer world, where incidents of a similar character are too frequent to call forth more than the passing ejaculation: "poor fellow!"

They stood, perhaps a minute, in which no word or gesture betrayed the workings of heart or mind on the part of the many spectators.

Myra was the first to break the silence. "Will *no* effort be made to rescue him?" she cried, looking wildly about her, her cheeks glowing and blanching alternately, her eyes on fire, dreamy no longer but eager and penetrating, as though she would read their inmost souls. "Must he perish here before our very eyes, without even an *attempt* to avert his awful doom? Oh if we could only save him! it *may* not be too late!"

Recalled thus to themselves, their sympathies aroused and energies quickened, incited to the undertaking by the spirit and vehemence of the over-excited girl, volunteers arose on every hand, and crew and passengers hurried about the deck in confusion.

A life-boat was immediately lowered, and one heroic heart stood still as they neared the sinking form. His strength was evidently

failing fast, as he was borne rapidly onward with the restless tide; another moment and all would be over. Oh if they could only save him! But the agony of suspense—who has not felt it! He essayed to utter a feeble cry which ended in a stifled moan. He made one last, one dying struggle, beat the air and fought madly with the destroyer, beneath whose current to sink but once is certain death, since the hapless wight who falls a victim to its pitiless embrace closes his eyes to be re-opened only in the world beyond. With superhuman energy, the stiffening lips parted; the call for help died away in a shriek of despair, when—O horrors! the little canoe, to which he had clung so long, floated far beyond his reach, and the livid countenance vanished from sight, just as he was snatched by his rescuers from a watery grave.

Deafening cheers now rent the air, and as shout after shout echoed along the stream, only one voice joined not in the general enthusiasm; only one figure remained mute and motionless; only one heart too full for utterance!

Mr. Marston, his wife and a couple of elderly gentlemen, with whom he had been conversing below, alarmed by the unusual uproar, rushed upon the deck as the lifeless burden was being lifted on board the larger craft.

"Young Fairfield, or my name is not George Baley!" exclaimed the good captain in unfeigned surprise, his equanimity having been sadly unbalanced by the excitement of the moment.

Myra had only a glimpse of the drowned man's face, as his bearers passed on their way to the cabin. But such a face! Would she had never seen it! Features such as no human artist could paint nor sculptor chisel; an expression such as to defy portrayal! The cheeks wore a tinge of Southern suns, despite their ashy whiteness; the eyes closed lightly, as in slumber; the lips half parted, as though to speak. Ebon ringlets clustered thick about the marble brow, while upon the whole rested an indescribable serenity, manly in its helplessness, beautiful even in death!

But the broad chest heaved not, and the arms fell limp and passive at his side.

"He is dead," murmured a dozen smothered voices. "Poor fellow, and so young too!"

Amusement for the night being at an end, the ladies returned to the saloon, while restoratives were being applied with untiring

diligence, and every remedy tested, if perchance some wizard probe might extract the bolt which Death had slipped in Cupid's quiver, and fan into flame the smoldering spark of life and animation.

An hour passed ere the captain made his appearance again among them.

"How is he?" inquired the anxious voice of a motherly looking old woman, who had shed a few hysterical tears over the untimely end of the young stranger.

"I am pleased to announce much better," returned the honest officer with evident satisfaction. "But he was almost gone—*almost* gone," he repeated musingly, "so near the other world in fact that I had almost despaired of his ever opening his eyes again in this."

"Yes, madam," he added cheerfully; "I have great hopes of his recovery, *great* hopes. I flatter myself with the belief that we have conquered the enemy, and have, if I mistake not, cheated for once the grim monster of his prey. His condition, both physical and mental, is greatly debilitated, as a matter of course, but all that human skill *can* do, is being done, and I cherish the hope that he will pull through after all, in spite of the odds against him."

Myra breathed freely once more, until his searching glance resting at length upon her, he continued feelingly: "Miss Marston, I have to congratulate you. You have saved, not only a fellow creature, but a *gentleman*. We owe much to your impulsiveness, for had a moment more been lost, we all well know the fatal consequences. I have known the young gentleman from a youth, and could never have forgiven myself had not every exertion been made to rescue him from the sad fate which so imminently threatened him. He has traveled frequently with me, and I have always found him a most amiable and agreeable companion. He is a noble young fellow, and I can only add that I trust he will, in a day or two, be sufficiently restored to thank you in person."

She did not reply, but acknowledged his felicitation by a bow only, and a look that spoke more than words. She would have disclaimed the credit so generously conceded, would have declared herself the debtor, but she could not. The episode of the evening had been of so startling a nature, so strange and new to her

untutored eyes, as to well-nigh deprive her of the power of speech during the period of anxiety and suspense.

No one seemed inclined to renew their several diversions, and a general movement was made toward the state-rooms.

The invalid was reported "convalescent" on the following morning, and much curiosity was manifested by the fair sex to behold the dark-haired Apollo—the hero of the night.

Myra was sitting in the saloon a few days later, glancing listlessly over the pages of a late novel,—although her thoughts were anywhere but with the fated heroine,—when—strange echo to her reverie! Captain Baley was seen approaching, bearing on his arm a tall, graceful figure, which her quick eye instantly recognized as the reanimated form she had beheld pale and prostrate in the yellow moon-beams.

"Miss Marston, Mr. Fairfield desires an introduction to his preserver," began the worthy veteran by way of presentation.

She rose in some confusion, as the gentleman referred to was bowing his acknowledgments.

He looked the hero—cap-a-pie: commanding in person, elegant in manner, gallant and deferential. In age he might have ranged anywhere between twenty-five and thirty; for while his appearance bespoke youth, his polished mien and general bearing proved him no tyro in society and the world. He looked rather haggard, and not a little worsted from his recent experience, but with returning life his face had resumed its native hue, and showed a complexion dark and clear, and an expression mild yet resolute.

Myra came near starting as his eyes met hers. Something in their midnight fascinated and perplexed her. Where had she seen that face before? Surely it was the counterpart of some familiar visage! The spell lasted but an instant, and the delusion vanished as a rich, manly voice declared his gratitude, the simple avowal of which needed only its own earnest frankness as a voucher for its sincerity. The quivering nostril and sudden flush upon the olive cheek evinced undeniable emotion as he said: "I have no words in which to thank you; I owe you a debt I can never cancel."

"Oh say not so!" protested the embarrassed girl, feeling secretly annoyed at being thus credited with a service she had never ren-

dered. "You have nothing for which to thank me. You greatly overestimate the petty assistance which 'twas my privilege to extend to a fellow-being in distress; and I deserve no credit for following the dictates of conscience and impulse, since however eager might have been my wish to save you, beyond that wish I was powerless as an infant.

"Captain Baley, here, has shamed me more than once by congratulating me upon imaginary exploits; and it is to him, I presume, that I owe the error into which you, like others, have fallen. I hold no lien upon your gratitude, I assure you; I merely acted as any one present would have done had circumstances been otherwise; and if, by means of a more acute sense of hearing and keener eyesight, I was in any way instrumental in forwarding the rescue, that consciousness alone were recompense ample beyond desert."

A mingled look of surprise and admiration played upon the countenance of the handsome stranger, but the quiet acquiescence which signified he would not alarm her delicacy by a reiteration of his obligation, was more eloquent implied than expressed.

"You will find in Mr. Fairfield the hero of quite a thrilling adventure; and as you like romance, Miss Marston, persuade him to relate the story in detail. How he fell into the hands of robbers, their midnight council, their resolve to take his life, unprecedented magnanimity of one of the band, who released him under cover of darkness, and furnished him with a dug-out in which to make good his escape; how his canoe was finally capsized; his sensations up to the time of his losing consciousness, etc., etc. A remarkable story, Miss! a remarkable story! Why! would you think it? My hair actually stood on end as I listened: *I*, who from a boy have been brought in frequent contact with such desperadoes as he describes; and if it affects you proportionately, I can insure him a spell-bound auditor. You will find him a tractable subject, and a most interesting narrator," observed the good-natured captain, as his ready wit suggested the propriety of retiring.

Myra shuddered as he ran through the catalogue of horrors with easy fluency, and a look of unutterable sadness stole into the melancholy eyes as they remarked the movement.

"Such stories are not for sensitive ears," interposed the young man gloomily.

"Tell me," said Fairfield when they were alone, "was it you whom I heard singing on that eventful night? I thought it was an angel's voice," he went on dreamily. "I have often heard the expression: 'Sold for a song.' I could better appreciate: 'Saved by a song.' I had hoped againt hope, battled bravely with the dangers that surrounded me, confident in the belief that timely succor would be sent to aid me; but when I called aloud, and called in vain, an unmanly cowardice got the better of me; my courage sank with decreasing strength, and my cries ceased from sheer exhaustion. Having been so long in the water, I found my limbs beginning to stiffen, and I was suddenly seized with an indescribable numbness, that ominous precursor which warned me of my impending doom. The horrible reality burst upon me, and in the bitterness of despair, I imagined myself resigned to the fate which awaited me.

"It was at this juncture that a low, uncertain sound was borne, like distant music, to my ear. You can form no conception of that moment's anguish. The familiar chord rent my very heart-strings, awakened a world of slumbering associations, and a flood of memories overwhelmed me. My heart went back to home and its dear ones. I thought of my fond mother and my beautiful sister. My whole life passed before me in the twinkling of an eye; fleeter than thought the years rolled past, like the ever-varying hues of a revolving kaleidoscope, while every hard word and foolish act in the shifting picture seemed burnt in flaring letters upon an inky tablet. I seemed standing upon the very brink of eternity; I could see the black seething waters of the River of Death, beyond which all was wrapped in obscurity. A nameless fear took possession of me; I tried to pray, but my lips, alas! refused to do their office.

"Again that tender strain smote on my ear. 'Twas hard to die so young, so far from home and friends, with no well-known voice to lull the soul to rest, no parting word to cheer the drooping spirit ere it embarked for the dark unknown, and no dear familiar face upon which to fix the eyes in death! 'Twas hard to die alone, with none to watch beside my bier but the ravenous monsters of

the river! 'Twas hard to rest in an unknown grave, whose cold, damp clods no sun-beam could warm nor violet shadow!

"The thought was maddening: I *could* not die! I screamed for help; the music ceased and human voices were distinctly audible. I repeated the shout—echoes mocked my cry; reason told me that all was over; I fought, I struggled, I sank; a thick mist obscured my vision; I knew nothing else until I awoke to life and consciousness."

Myra would fain have heard more of an experience of so strange and thrilling a nature. The air of mystery which enveloped the hero of so hazardous an adventure, his miraculous escape, the spice of romance attaching to their meeting, and the fancied likeness to some one she had seen or known before, excited the liveliest interest within her, and set at work her speculative imagination.

The stranger might have guessed something of what was passing in her thoughts, from the eager attention and sympathy with which she listened to the recital. He turned the conversation however, and she, fearing to probe a wound or display an unwarrantable curiosity in regard to the private affairs of one upon whose confidence she had no claims, would not ask him to resume the subject

He was frequently near her during the evening, and she had many opportunities for the study of his character, a problem—simple, yet abstruse, refuting every solution which conjecture offered, fascinating because it baffled her. She observed him narrowly, but no trace of the resemblance that had struck her so forcibly at the moment of presentation lingered in the ever-varying countenance.

Her perspicacity was lost in perplexity. She did not dare to analyze her feelings, nor acknowledge the impression that a pair of dark eyes and a musical voice had stamped upon her memory. She pondered his words long after she had sought her cabin; tossed restlessly upon her berth, coaxing sleep to still her ruminations. But the drowsy god was deaf to her wooing.

They were nearing the Crescent City, at which place they intended stopping for a week. She learned from his conversation that Fairfield was a native of New Orleans, where he had spent the greater portion of his life, but was now a resident of Havana,

whither he intended returning as soon as he had transacted the business that had called him hither. Their destinations being the same, he attached himself to the Marston party, which arrangement, the elders being equally prepossessed in his favor, was highly agreeable to all parties.

Their brief sojourn was a period of unalloyed happiness to our heroine, and recorded in memory's register as the brightest page in her life's history. Elmer was a faithful and instructive cicerone, and felt a laudable pride in showing his new friends over the picturesque haunts of his boyhood's home. With an instinctive appreciation of the antique and beautiful, borrowed from his own sunny clime, heightened by travel and a year dreamed away under Italian skies, the amateur had ripened into a cultured connoisseur, descrying beauties which less artistic eyes would pass unnoticed. He had entirely recovered from his plunge in the Mississippi, and his looks and spirits had improved accordingly. He had a host of friends and acquaintances in his native city, many of whom had heard of his late adventure, and he was constantly hailed upon the streets, and pressed upon to relate the tragic narrative. He evaded thier queries, declaring that the incident was a matter of no moment and unworthy a rehearsal; yet, notwithstanding the levity with which he seemed disposed to treat the whole affair, Myra could not fail to notice the shade of annoyance and unusual depression consquent upon any allusion to it.

They were much together; the days were warm and cloudless, and the week promised to be one of uninterrupted pleasure. She found much to please and interest her, and no sight was thoroughly enjoyed which was not mutually shared. Places of interest were visited in order of note, where he was at once guide, escort and instructor; growing enthusiastic oftentimes in recounting some childish feat called to mind by familiar scenes, fraught with tender associations.

She could listen for hours to stories of Eastern lands. She accompanied him in his voyage across the broad Atlantic, followed him in his travels from burning Greece to the frozen Alps. One moment she stood amid the ruins of ancient Rome, the next she reclined in a luxurious gondola, lulled by the strains of a soft Italian song, as she glided noiselessly past the marble palaces of

beautiful Venice. She was gazing upon the white, dazzling, cloud-capped heights of Mount Blanc; the scene shifted, and she was wandering through a scented vale, where every breeze came laden with the breath of roses, kissing, as it passed, the coy young aspens till they trembled 'neath the shy caress. Again she is rapt by the entrancing melody of a Cashmere singing girl, whose voice is only equaled by the syrinda upon which she plays, rivaling in sweetness the philomel or celestial bird. She liked to study his versatile humor, as he seemed to live over again days resurrected by his sensible imagery; to mark the flashing eye when kindled by excitement, or, when the pathetic was touched upon, the glistening orbs, beneath whose dusky drapery slumbered volumes of unwritten poetry, telling of a soul fervid though gentle, unflinching in battle, tender in affection, fit to adorn a warrior or a lover.

Such hours were dangerously delightful. There was a philter in the balmy dews of Indian summer, freighting with distilled odors each passing breeze; there was an incantation in the river's ceaseless murmur; and the happy dreamers, unmindful of the all-conquering genius about whose wand were being wreathed life's fairest blossoms, stopped not to reflect, lest they should sever some thread in the golden tissue woven 'mid music, flowers and sunshine. What though the perfume of violet and magnolia lived only in imagination, and garnered fruits and yellow fields heralded the death of the waning year when perpetual spring-time reigned within?

Oh youth! oh love!—blind and fondly confident. Why should they note the fleeting moments? and the chubby god laughed and exulted, adding fresh tips to his jeweled arrows. But the last uncertain day-beam! was it not an emblem of human happiness, transitory e'en as 'tis brilliant? And the falling leaves and blighted rose-buds! had they no silent warning?

CHAPTER XIII.

A MUTUAL SURPRISE.

"I CAN'T realize that we are strangers," said Fairfield when they had been three days together; "I seem to have known you always. There is something strangely familiar in your face, your voice, your entire person in fact; and the idea is associated in my mind with green fields, clear skies, eternal spring, soft harmonies."

"Do you believe in the transmigration of souls?'!

"As a general rule I have no opinion on the subject; in the present instance I have half a mind to say that I do; I can account for it on no other grounds."

"Then we must have been old acquaintances in the Elysian Fields."

"Well!—yes; but my memory dates from an earlier epoch. The retrospect savors more of the terrestrial; and then—if, as the ancients contended, we drank, on leaving, of the Lethean waters, all recollection of an anterior existence, as well as our residence there, would be steeped alike in oblivion."

"I have a theory—one very flattering to ourselves, however. Each of us must have been a superior kind of ghost, with intellectual calibre of a higher order than our honorable contemporaries, in consequence of which, the draught which deadened theirs only clouded ours."

"Or more probable still, there was drouth about that time, or an excursion party of shades leaving on the next sun-beam, which being the case, our potations were necessarily less copious than usual. I have an idea that your former estate was that of a marine deity; you were a siren; your home was beneath the white crested waves in the pearly chambers of some spacious conch. See!—your cheeks reflect the tint of your palace walls, your lips the hue of coral gardens, and your hair a dusky glow of Caspian sands. You lured unsuspecting seamen from their course, then left them to their fate. How many have you consigned to the

billows of despair, Miss Marston?" he put the question abruptly, eagerly.

Disregarding both compliment and query, save that a deeper shadow flitted o'er the pink cheek, with averted face, she replied: "I don't like your theory; we will do away with Lethe and Elysium; I prefer the progressive system: I hold that we are in a higher state of existence now than ever before. You were nothing so dignified as a sailor, or I as a siren. Judging from the condition in which I first saw you, I should say that water was *your* native element; you were a waterfowl."

"Did I say that I was a sailor?"

Myra crimsoned to the roots of her hair.

"And so I was a waterfowl," he went on, not a little pleased at her embarrassment. "Let me see!—something less than a swan and larger than a duck: I was a goose—good. I am half inclined to think you are right; at least I have, in the past twenty-four hours, had reason to question whether I were not degenerating to my original state," with a keen glance.

"If the fancy pleases you, I shall not contradict it," she rejoined wickedly, painfully conscious of her late blunder.

"It *does* please me: I like it," with a peculiar smile; "but you, I hold that we were kindred spirits. If I was a goose, you too were of the feathered tribe—something more delicate, more beautiful, but of a similar species nevertheless."

"A dove or a merlin?"

"Neither: your disposition resembles neither. You were a canary, a dear little —— No! better than that—you were a nightingale. There!—I've hit it at last—you were a nightingale. I like the nightingale; it is such a constant bird; it has one, and one only love. Not all the spicy odors and beauteous wealth of Oriental gardens can tempt it to forget or forsake its own loved rose. And she, worthy of her lover, unfolds her heart to its magic note and listens to no other. Oh happy rose! loving and beloved! Change my metamorphosis, Miss Marston; drop me a few rounds in the creative scale: I should prefer being a rose above anything you could mention."

Myra discovered that it was late and time to retire.

They were at the opera one evening, when a gentleman,

touching her escort lightly on the shoulder, accosted him familiarly.

Fairfield turned, and recognizing the intruder, returned his salutation with an indifference bordering upon hauteur.

Another tap and an important whisper, drowned in the high soprano of the prima-donna.

"Mr. McLyons desires an introduction," he said to his companion a moment later.

She looked at him enquiringly.

"Oh! he is 'blue ton,'" he replied in answer to the mute interrogatory; "his lineage and bullion are unimpeachable."

Myra imagined that something very like a curl played upon the proud lips as he pronounced the words with marked emphasis. She had scarcely time to recover herself when the singer's voice died away, and the subject of their remarks was bowing and smiling before her.

Tall, well proportioned, faultless in toilet, courtly in bearing, she would have been at a loss to explain her instinctive repugnance; but there was something about his countenance she did not like. It might have been in the bland smile with which he accompanied his graceful observations—unctuous with the oil of delicate flattery, or a lurking expression about the eyes, which might have been handsome, only she could never determine their color, inasmuch as they assiduously avoided hers.

With the ease and self-possession of a polished man of the world, who is thoroughly conscious of his own importance, he had, for the time being, eyes or ears for naught else but her to whom he addressed his sprightliest bon-mots, politely unobservant of any coolness on the part of Fairfield, who maintained a haughty silence throughout the whole. His conversation bored, his compliments annoyed her, since intuition taught her that this mellifluent suavity was the ring of a counterfeit; she could with difficulty suppress a sigh of relief therefore, when, with a regretful "*au revoir*," the distinguished petit-maitre passed on until arrested by a fashionable bevy who were evidently flattered by his attention.

"Mr. McLyons is an old friend?" when he was well out of earshot.

"Only an acquaintance," was the phlegmatic response, with just the slightest touch of sarcasm and a momentary distortion of

that most expressive of all features, the mouth, which she had noticed once before.

She perceived that the subject was not a pleasant one, and his name was mentioned no more between them.

Their last day in the Crescent City was not less genial than the rest; the sky was as clear, the languid breeze as fragrant, still a cloud lowered upon Elmer's brow. Ardent, impetuous and meditative, from early boyhood his happiest hours had been those passed in the fairy realm of fiction or in the wilder flights of his own imagination. Valiant and venturous, but docile and tender as a girl, his soul was the home of chivalry, yet he had never loved. He had known the fair of every clime, had reverenced all; but the wealth of his poetic heart had been lavished upon an abstract, some gentle Dryad or sweet-voiced Houri, a creation of fancy, the inspiration of his muse. Without heed or thought he had drifted on, until aroused from his fanaticism, he found his ideal suddenly supplanted by a sprite of mortal mould; that he, who had believed himself invulnerable to beauty, wealth and greatness, was at last entangled in those nameless meshes which lovers know so well; that he at length beheld the embodiment of his deity, the goddess of his dreams; in a word—that he *loved.*

But why the clouded brow and anxious eye? What! was it not enough that they must part on the morrow,—part, perhaps forever? Better never to have seen her, than to have known, loved, and lost her! How he had watched the speaking eye, the soft suffusion of her cheek, as though in these he would read his doom! But love is ever humble, distrustful of its own worth, and doubt is its capricious attendant. To him the volume was closed and clasped, with the precious secret locked within. How often through those pensive autumn nights had he kept unwelcome vigil, battling with the life problem, which, scorning prosaic reason, was left unsolved when cold, gray dawn kissed the heavy lids and vouchsafed a short, uneasy slumber.

He had been out to keep an engagement and returned later than usual. He looked worn and grave to-night, and the vision which greeted him on reaching the hotel served by no means to lessen his disquietude. He had always thought her pretty, but ascribed her fascination to witchery of manner rather than to symmetry

of feature; he saw her now in a new phase, beautiful as a dream of Eden to the enamored eyes that feasted on its loveliness. She had risen and had not resumed her seat. Was it the exquisite blending of tints, or the peculiar style of evening toilet that showed a form more airy than the creamy lace which adorned it, and eyes more splendid than the jewels whose brilliant scintillations flashed from the white throat and wavy hair at each new pose of the graceful wearer, lending to nature that artistic finish, or was it only a chimera aggravated by the thoughts of separation? He knew not; but standing under the tall gas jets, flushed and animated, she made a picture certainly.

He could not trust himself to speak of the parting, or even to sit near her. This cowardice was new to him; but he feared to meet those eyes and listen to that voice, which, to amorous ears, was like the music of a laughing rill. He sat apart and watched her furtively. Suddenly he started; the color fled from his olive cheek; his heart stood still, and his hand trembled violently It lasted but an instant. Recovering himself, he looked about him, thankful for the noisy conversation which held the attention of the several groups, so that none had remarked his agitation. Something on her chain had caught his eye—an odd little ornament by the way, and rather out of taste when worn with costlier jewels; but it was only a trifle, a childish bauble, half hidden in folds of yellow lace, and unnoticed by more careless observers. He looked again, this time more calmly. Presently he crossed over and joined her.

"Miss Marston," he began with some hesitation; "I am about to take an impertinent liberty. Will you promise to excuse it?"

"The pardon shall be in proportion to the offense," she replied, looking up.

"Well, then," he continued with a more thoughtful air, "I should like to inquire the meaning of that murderous weapon you wear. Is not a dagger a singular appendage to a young lady's toilet? Is it a declaration of war or merely a freak of feminine fancy? I trust you will not deem me *too* presumptuous when I beg a closer inspection."

"What!—this?" and she laughed lightly. "Why, I prize this above every trinket I possess. It is the opening chapter of a romance—ACT THE FIRST. It was given to me by one heroic youth

who saved my life when I was a wee baby girl. This is the token by which I shall recognize him—*my hero*—when we meet, as of course we shall, else the drama would not be complete. We will, in all probability, stumble upon each other in some out-of-the-way place, in a manner equally surprising, upon occasion of which, the closing scene will be enacted. Isn't it romantic?"

A strange light glowed in the matchless eyes as she spoke, but the calm exterior betrayed nothing of the ebullition within. "Very," when, after a minute examination, he replaced the souvenir.

"This is our last night together," he said, after a momentary silence; "you will not refuse me a promenade?"

Was ever night more glorious! a night when lovers' sighs seem but the fragrance of some modest flower. Their walk was upon a long gallery overlooking the court-yard; there was a lull in the city's din, and the low patter of a distant fountain was just audible, the subdued laughter of white Naiades as they frolicked in the snowy spray.

Her hand slipped lightly from the arm upon which it rested. He caught the tiny fugitive in his own, and as though he would crush the fragile member in his ecstatic clasp, cried in wild exultation: "My angel! my queen! I have found you at last."

She would have screamed, but the sound died upon her lips. She stood with dilating eyes and burning cheeks, looking the amazement she could not utter.

"Oh look not so! oh look not so!" he cried in passionate reproachfulness. "My own! my love! my life! are you not dearer to me than all else on earth beside? and have I not loved you through all these long, long years, and sought you in every stranger maid I met? Myra! oh Myra! you little guess the love I bear you. 'Twas you, a toddling infant, whose baby face incited me to the first heroic deed of my boyhood; and since the hour that I snatched you from the fearful death which threatened you, and laid you triumphantly in your mother's arms, my heart has known no other idol. When I felt those chubby arms about my neck, and a little tear-stained cheek pressed close to mine; when I felt your little heart beat hard against my own, a strange new feeling crept into my being, a feeling I can ne'er forget! kindling ambition, while it pierced the very depths of my boyish heart. It

set my youthful soul on fire; I felt myself a hero and a knight; and it was then that I registered a solemn vow, that should I live to call myself a man, I would find you, search you out among the millions of a busy world, and win you for mine own. I worshipped you in ideal, and my heart has never wavered; but when I find the reality surpassing all that fancy painted, words are but vain, I cannot speak my adoration. Give me! oh give me the life I saved!"

She did not speak, but stood mute and passive, while her soul drunk the words of his passionate pleading.

"But why this silence? Speak. Have you no word for the man who would give his life to call you his own? You are mine! *mine!*—you cannot oppose what Fate decrees and Heaven approves; else by what mysterious Providence are we thrown again across each other's paths?

"You *do* love me," he went on excitedly; "I read it in the face you fain would screen; but oh! be true to yourself and me, for you little know the nature with which you have to deal. Better to have left me to my watery grave than consign me to a more pitiless doom."

He paused, and a painful silence followed. The truth at length beamed upon her. This, then, was *he*, her hero, the peerless and the brave. How strange the words sounded! and yet how often had she repeated them! *her hero!* Her heart throbbed an echo to each word as it fell. A fearful struggle was waging within as the slender figure swayed with suppressed emotion. At last from the depths of her secret soul came a half-drawn sigh, soft as the flutter of a Peri's wing.

Tears stood in the hazel eyes raised to meet his own, only to fall again beneath his impassioned gaze.

The accents were low and uncertain, telling of the humiliation the confession cost her: "If it be wrong, forgive me; if unwomanly, hate me; if weak, then pity me; I cannot be false to myself and you." The proud head fell, and the voice died away in the faintest whisper: "Elmer! I love you."

CHAPTER XIV.

A THRILLING NARRATIVE.

HOME again! Elmer had, by an ingenious calculation, ascertained that his most direct route to Havana lay through B——; which being the case, he could not deny himself the pleasure of calling at the paternal mansion, and testing the hospitality of those who had proved themselves such delightful traveling companions.

Very gratifying he found it as he sat to-night in the spacious drawing-room, whose winter garniture and cheery light made an enviable picture of home and comfort. Heavy curtains hung in folds about the broad windows to shut out December's chilling blast, which played Æolian airs through the paneled doors and crevices, and in its wild sweep over field and fen, smote on the ear like orphans' sobs or widows' moans, in striking antithesis with the merry voices within. The blazing wood fire cast a ruddy glow over the apartment, lending a brighter tinge to the soft carpet and sumptuous hangings.

Myra shivered.

"What is it?" he asked anxiously.

"Only the wind," she replied lightly. "I dislike to hear it—it always fills my mind with weird fancies, which are not only disagreeable but depressing. It has a language I could never master; sometimes I imagine that it actually speaks, and oftentimes have lain awake for hours together, when all else was silent, trying to interpret its mystical dialect."

"Then you must not think of it. You are, like myself, I fear, rather prone to the visionary. Such fantasies, however, though fascinating, are irrational, and should not be indulged. At least, I intend to be very exacting for the short while we are together, jealous—if you will; and shall honor with my cordial hatred the envied object, be it animate or inanimate, that robs me of a thought or smile that might otherwise be mine. Changing the subject, is the gentleman I met last evening your cousin-german?"

"No. We are related neither by consanguinity nor affinity;

and yet, he is my own brother. There now! there is a riddle for you," she added with provoking mystification.

"A little Sphinx!" he retaliated, in the same teasing strain.

"Do I look very frightful? Oh! I comprehend your meaning," her eyes sparkling with spirit and mischief; "you have a hope that I may vent my chagrin in self-destruction, should you prove a clever Œdipus. Don't flatter yourself with any such idea; I will not be so easily gotten rid of."

"Tantalizing, irresistible creature!" muttered the lover, half fond, half petulant.

"But the riddle?"

"I give it up."

"A brother by mutual regard."

"A tie more lasting than kinship. He is a most engaging companion, certainly; I can't think when I have met one with whom I was more entirely pleased."

"Every one likes Lionel," said Myra warmly, happy to sing the praises of her favorite. "He is universally beloved, and deservedly so; for underneath that placid countenance breathes one of the noblest souls that ever adorned a mortal tenement."

"Just the opinion I had formed of him. He is well versed in foreign lore, and extensively traveled also. Harrison—Harrison," he repeated meditatively; "our transatlantic experiences appear to have been very similar—strange we have never met before."

"Not strange at all. Lionel has not been abroad of late years; and besides, being signalized by no external peculiarities, you would naturally pass *his* unnoticed, like the hundreds of other strange faces one sees in traveling. What I *do* think surprising though, is, that we should have remained together for more than a week, without even a suspicion, on the part of either, as to the other's identity."

"There I differ from you. Your mother, you must remember, was, at the time of our first meeting, quite young, and a fragile invalid, the hectic flush of whose cheek was altogether different, I assure you, from the bloom of health and happiness such as she now wears. Your father, who was spare, and in appearance a mere youth, is now corpulent and bearded. As for yourself—well! I dare say fourteen years are apt to work some *slight* changes in a

young lady of three summers. Of myself I will not speak; a wilful, impetuous boy, and by no means *distingue*, to say nothing of the excitement and confusion consequent upon the scene alluded to, and the hasty exit I was compelled to make in order to catch my train, which had already started, leaving no time to enquire either names or localites; so on the whole, I do not think it at all remarkable that either they or I should have failed to recognize the other; indeed, it would have been extraordinary had it been otherwise.

"As for the suspicion, I cannot answer for that. I can't tell the sleepless nights I have spent soliloquizing on this wise: 'Fourteen years ago,—three years old; seventeen now,—right! Golden curls,—wrong! hair might have turned darker as she grew up; very probably it did. Eyes—eyes; let me see! eyes—I can't think! Father spare, mother delicate; it won't do! the former might have grown fleshy with age and the latter recovered;—oh! pshaw! what a fool I am!'"

A merry laugh from his companion answered the recital.

"Mother and father were so disturbed at not being able to discover your name or whereabouts," she said, when her mirth had subsided, "and have regretted it so often since. They made diligent inquiries after your departure, but no one present could furnish the desired information."

"Did no one else regret it?" archly.

"No," with a captivating *insouciance*.

"Granted. You are skilled in the use of that little negative, I see," he continued playfully. And then more gravely: "But seriously, Myra, tell me, looking back from the summit upon which we now stand, are you sorry that we were so long in finding each other out?"

"No," she answered brightly; "I would not have it otherwise, would not vary the smallest particular; for in so doing, you would sever the thread of romance, which, you must acknowledge, is a pleasing sequel to our mutual attachment. Had you, by any chance, have recognized me sooner, you might have been influenced by imaginary rather than the true dictates of your own heart; while I, on the other hand, in consideration of the debt of gratitude I so justly owed you, should have felt in duty bound to accept you, regardless of whether I liked you or not. I feel much

happier to know that you loved me for myself alone, and as an entire stranger, with a mind unbiased, either for or against. So you see, it was all exactly as it should have been. Confess that I am right."

"Yes, you are right; it was all exactly as it should have been," he conceded unhesitatingly; "I was drawn toward you by an irresistible impulse, from the first moment of our meeting; and although I had not vanity enough at the time to hazard the bare supposition that felicity so consummate could ever be mine, I know now that my love was not wholly unrequited; which circumstance is proof conclusive of what I have so often asserted, that our hearts were joined in heaven."

In reciprocal chat the hours sped by; their thoughts naturally drifted toward the future, and the conversation gradually became more serious.

Myra looked unusually grave, as though she were revolving a question of great moment.

"Elmer," she said at length, "would you do anything I asked you?"

"Do you doubt it?" reproachfully.

"Well, then, I hope you will not think me inquisitive, for indeed it is not for the mere gratification of idle curiosity that I ask it; but it has troubled me so much, and I feel that I have a right to know.

"I want you to tell me all about those dreadful robbers; how you came to be captured, in the first place, and more wonderful still! when once in their clutches, why you were permitted to escape. I can't think that you regret your natant exploits, since ——," he did not interrupt her with a happy re-assurance, such as she had expected, and adopting a more modest phraseology, she concluded with a vivid blush: "since but for that, we might never have known each other.

"I have thought so much about it," she explained, her embarrassment increasing, as, from his silence, she feared lest she had, in some way, excited his displeasure, or else have made an undue exhibition of her fondness. "It has even intruded upon my dreams; and do you know that I have sometimes fancied there was a mystery attendant upon your midnight adventure which you were rather loth to disclose?"

The love-light, which a moment before had illumined his noble countenance, fled at the words which fell from the rose-bud lips, innocent, as to intention, as dewdrops from their sister blossom. His expression was balefully dark, as turning sadly from her, he covered his face with his hands.

Myra was nonplused. She gazed at him in mute astonishment, unable to define her emotions. Sorrow for having caused him pain, wounded pride and resentment struggled for mastery. What had she done to merit that silent rebuke? and what reason could be assigned for this singular behavior—this evident aversion to a subject of such vital interest to them both. A vague apprehension seized her.

A minute elapsed ere he spoke, and when he did, his voice faltered.

"Myra," he said gloomily, "why should I tell you? Why did you ask me? The circumstance is better forgotten than remembered. I feel and know that you are deeply concerned in all that affects my happiness; but it is because I love you better than my life, and value your peace far more than my own, that I would fain conceal from you what I know would cast a damper upon your tender, sunny nature."

A look of unutterable grief clouded the habitually bright face as she asked bitterly: "Is this then my portion? Am I to be the participant of your joys without the privilege of alleviating your sorrows? Do you disdain my sympathy? or do you look upon me merely as a wayward child—like a new toy, amusing for the hour, but a worthless incumbrance in time of trouble? You cruelly wrong me, Elmer; I will share all, or none."

"I do *not* disdain your sympathy, indeed I do not," he remonstrated earnestly. "If I have wronged you, it was only to save you pain; and if I have been unjust, you have repaid me tenfold.

"It *must* be told! you have a right to demand it," he exclaimed desperately. Then peering eagerly into hers with his great searching eyes, his words were low and hurried: "Myra! do you know what you have asked? Do you know that you have asked me to relate a tragedy,—to reveal a dark secret of which I alone am the guardian? Are you sure that you will never betray my trust should I consign it to your keeping?"

Her countenance changed. Oh! the horrible suspicion that filled her mind! sending the color from her cheeks, leaving them white and ghastly. She recoiled involuntarily, and strove to release the hand he had held while speaking.

His attention was arrested by the movement, and for the first time he remarked her pallor.

"Great heavens!" he cried in unfeigned surprise and dismay, as the awful implication of his own words evolved slowly from the hazy recesses of his perturbed intellect, "what means this sudden distrust? That look you wear will break my heart!"

His cheeks mantled, and kindling coruscations, which might have been born of pride or ire, flashed from the piercing eyes, like electric sparks from an angry storm-cloud. "What dreadful thing is in your thoughts? You need not shrink from me as though you believed me a thief or a murderer! *I* have committed no crime, Myra; my hands and conscience are alike unsullied. No stigma has ever rested upon the name I asked you to share. God forbid that I should be guilty of an act so base! It was

THE ROBBER'S STORY

to which I alluded; his former connection with one very dear to me, and the one rash, yet fatal deed that brought sudden grief to so many loving hearts, cruelly bereft, of the two beings most dear to her on earth, the sweetest, purest soul that ever breathed, and blasted forever his own glorious youth; until, in the anguish of despair, he sought to flee from his conscience and his kind, where, maddened by remorse, he at last became what he now is, a castaway and an outlaw. It was this—the recollection of what her sufferings must have been, and pity for the fall and hopeless degradation of a once noble spirit—that occasioned the emotion you have just witnessed."

Her color flowed back. "Forgive me, Elmer," looking beseechingly into his aggrieved yet resolute face. "I despise myself for the thought; and yet——," she added with a shudder: "I could not suppress the awful whisper."

The barrier which doubt had, for a moment, erected, melted beneath the gentle beam. "I have nothing to forgive," he responded with equal contrition. "The fault was mine, not yours. My words must have sounded strangely ambiguous, not to say

frightfully significant; although it did not occur to me at the time, that you might probably misconstrue my meaning, and deduce an inference other than I had intended to imply. Shall we dismiss the unhappy theme? or are you still desirious of hearing the details?"

"If, by so doing, you violate no pledge."

"I am bound by no promise; honor and gratitude are sufficient guaranties against the betrayal of one to whom I owe my life. Be his character as blackened as it may, perfidy in me would be no less culpable."

"Then tell me all; I will never divulge the terrible secret."

"Upon one condition, that you will not allow it to prey upon your happiness. You will grant my behest?"

"Yes, I promise."

"Well, then!" began the reluctant narrator, "you must, in the first place, understand something of the commission which called me hither. I was connected with a firm, owning extensive landed estate in Eastern Louisiana, for the collection of rents and general supervision of which an agent was sent out annually. The gentleman who had for years acted in that capacity resigned a few months since, in consequence of which, I was at once appointed his successor. Finding the counting-room grow dull and irksome, and pining for the old familiar scenes, the offer was gladly accepted.

"Adopting as my motto the prudent maxim, 'business first and pleasure afterwards,' I proceeded straight to the plantations, where a few weeks of patient industry served to fulfil the mission for which I came. With a large sum of money upon my person, I set out for the landing, twelve miles distant. Mine host, who was a cautious and I think a somewhat timid man, questioned me as to the condition of my arms. I laughingly replied that I had none. The good fellow seemed astounded when I remarked gaily that 'I was a peaceable character, and never carried concealed weapons.'

"'I don't reckon you have been much in this country,' he ventured.

"'Yes, I was raised here; but no one would know of the roll of bank-notes hidden away in my inner pocket, and I had no fears of being molested.'

"He said no more, but looked at me with an equivocal expression, which said more plainly than words, that he thought me a

soft-headed chap, who would be better off at home under the tutelage of a discreet guardian than in my present role as financier.

"He insisted that I should at least secure a guide, to provide against the possibility of losing myself in the great swamp which I was compelled to traverse. This I declared was unnecessary; I had carefully noticed the way in coming, and was quite sure I would find no difficulty in reaching my destination.

"My route lay through the heart of a dense forest where reigns perpetual twilight, since neither the vertical rays of noon nor the crimson glow of sunset can penetrate its gloom. There was a wild solemnity in the scene, and a fascination in its funereal beauty. Trees indigenous to soil and clime hedged the narrow road on either side, interweaving their overlapping boughs, which formed a verdurous canopy. Upon their venerable trunks high-water marks were distinctly visible; pale gray moss hung in graceful festoons from the upper branches, while it clung about the lower, dark and feculent, lending to the dead and leafless a weird aspect. Black veiled nuns stalked back and forth from out the shadows, motioning their heads in solemn warning as now and then some poisonous reptile crawled from out the tangled undergrowth, and twining itself about their phantom-like forms, shook the sable drapery. The spectral hallucination filled my mind with an indescribable awe; nature appealed on every hand to my higher being, and I felt a subdued reverence stealing over me. Narrow bayous were crossed at intervals, with the exception of which, no shifting of scenery relieved the eyes weary of its monotony.

"My thoughts naturally turned inward, and a sense of loneliness beguiled me into reverie. I had allowed myself ample time to catch the boat at noon, so rode leisurely on, paying but little heed to my surroundings. When I had gone a considerable distance, and thought it about time I was reaching the end of my journey, I suddenly awoke from my day dream and looked about me. I was in a small opening, where the debris of a sawmill lay strewn about the ground, and from which new and deep rutted roads diverged in every conceivable direction.

"Imagine my sensations! The dreadful reality burst upon me: *I was lost!* and that in what seemed an impenetrable wood, with no companion save ferocious beasts and reptiles. How I reprimanded myself for my folly! I had passed the forks where I was

to have turned, and in following the broader and apparently most traveled, road had been led, heaven only knew where! I looked at my watch; it had stopped. I had neglected to wind it up. This I remembered with chagrin, and added to my list of omissions. The sky was cloudy, and being without a compass, I had no means of ascertaining either time or course.

"No time was to be lost, so I at once set about extricating myself from the difficulties into which carelessness had plunged me. I held my breath and listened, if haply I might hear a human voice. No such music greeted my ears; but the hiss of a venomous serpent near by caused my horse to make an unexpected plunge, and rearing upon his haunches, came near lifting me from the saddle. I tried in vain to determine by which of the roads I had entered the glade; they all looked one and the same; reason furnished me no clue, and deliberation only increased my perplexity. Trusting entirely to chance, I took the one nearest by, thinking thus to retrace my steps or else reach a habitation or opening of some kind, which would put me again in the main road. My way was circuitous, and greatly obstructed by fallen trees and a tangled network of vines and shrubs, rendering progress slow and arduous. I traveled for hours in this style without the slightest prospect of bettering my condition. My hopes descended as I perceived that I was wading deeper and deeper into the labyrinth; night was hard upon me, and my appetite considerably whetted by an indefinite postponement of supper. All at once a small clearing dawned upon my delighted ken; my heart gave a bound as visions of French rolls and coffee arose before me in tantalizing delusion. I quickened my pace and emerged from the thicket, when, behold! the ruins of the old saw-mill loomed up in silent derision from out the shades of dusky eve! I had been traveling in a circle, and now stood upon precisely the same spot which I had occupied in the morning. My spirits fell below zero.

"Filled with dismay, I slackened the rein, and leaning forward, patted encouragingly the glossy neck of my tired steed. I had still a lingering hope that instinct might achieve what my sagacity had failed to accomplish. The intelligent animal seemed to understand the mute caress, for he rubbed his head affectionately against my hand and stepped boldly forward. He picked his way

lightly through the bushes, and soon struck a narrow bridle path, replete with briers and obstructions without number. Darkness ere long had gathered the world under her raven pinions, and my quick ear caught ever and anon the cry of a panther or barking of a wolf as a faint echo resounded in the distance. With every sense upon the alert, my emotions were any thing but enviable, as my horse groped his way slowly through the blackness.

"I suppose it was not quite midnight, although, in my excited frame of mind, I thought it much later, when, judging from the more muffled sound of his hoofs and the absence of brushwood, I congratulated myself that we had at last regained the beaten track. That day's teachings had impressed a salutary lesson, calling to remembrance that other journey of which it was so strikingly typical: the pain and suffering in store for those who, through carelessness or self-love, forsake the right, and when once astray, how rugged and how wearisome the path by which they must return!

"I had not gone far, when quicker than thought, an unseen hand grasped my bridle; a light flashed before my eyes, which the next instant were bandaged; a pistol was placed to my head with the ominous warning to 'hold my tongue, if I knew what was best for me,' and my pockets rifled. My blood ran cold, for I knew too well the nature of the characters into whose hands I had fallen. The exact number of men I could not determine; but I felt one on either side, and was apprised of the proximity of several others, as with strained ears I caught fragments of their murderous confabulation, carried on in a rough stage-whisper, and of which the low muttered words 'authorities' and 'a clear waste of ammunition' were distinctly audible. My feelings can be better imagined than described, as I listened.

"'Take him to the General,' suggested one; 'the job will be cleaner by daylight; at any rate the river bottom will leave no traces.'

"A coarse laugh followed this last observation, and the company moved off.

"In less than an hour we came to a sudden halt, when I was lifted from my saddle and led into a small, toppling shanty, which, in accordance with my own conjectures, stood in the densest portion of the wood. The bandage was taken from my eyes, but it

was some minutes before I could become sufficiently accustomed to the glare, consequent upon the sudden transition from darkness to light, to take in the scene before me.

"Four drunken outlaws were carousing around a small table, over which cards and whiskey bottles were strewn promiscuously. A tall dark man—whom I afterwards learned was the 'General,' to whom they alluded at the time of my capture—sat in a farther corner, apparently absorbed in the contents of a newspaper. He rose as my conductors addressed him by the title afore-mentioned, and I imagined that he started and turned pale as his eyes encountered mine. It lasted but an instant, however; he returned their greetings with dignified forbearance, listened with grave attention as they recounted the proceedings of the evening, after which, he stepped forward and invited me to partake of their 'rude hospitality,' with the grace and deference of a courtier. Reason taught me the folly of resistance, and that my one and only hope lay in a show of submission. Hungry and exhausted, I should have found it hard indeed to decline a civility so politely extended; so with an assumed nonchalance, I took the seat allotted me with what grace I could muster, and despite my impending fate, partook of the unpalatable food with a keen relish.

"The dark man had resumed his paper, and while pretending to be poring over its columns, I felt a vague consciousness, was watching my every movement, since, whenever I chanced to look in that direction, his eagle eyes were upon me. He was well proportioned and handsome; in age about fifty, slightly gray, and on the whole, an imposing figure; with an air of intelligence and refinement ill befitting his present surroundings.

"Supper over, I was led by my captors into an adjoining apartment, where I was securely bound, and every precaution taken against my escape. Then followed the council, the main import of which I could catch through the cracks in the rude partition. The reckoning up of the day's gains appeared to be first on programme; the money was duly counted, after which a low chuckle, and murmurs of 'a fat purse' and 'an easy subject' evinced their entire satisfaction. The question as to the time and place of my quietus was next introduced, and contemplated from every standpoint. Great diversity of opinion prevailed, betrayed by the noisy excitement of the intoxicated band.

The dark man rebuked them severely for their love of blood, and suggested that the prisoner be released upon the conditions that he take an oath against any disclosure regarding their sylvan retreat. This last proposition was met on all sides by jeers and fiendish laughter, indicative of supreme contempt. A drunken broil ensued, and a revolt was threatened, as they accused their chief of treachery, and pictured themselves dislodged by the officers of the law from their comparatively safe abode, and expiring upon a gallows or dragging out a weary existence in the narrow cells of a state prison. 'No, there was but one way out of the difficulty; he must be made away with, and that, too, before sunrise.'

"'Do as you like, I shall have nothing to do with it,' said the stern, commanding tones of the first speaker, accompanied by a loud rap upon the table, which being the signal to retire, the council adjourned for the night.

"Conceive of my feelings when I heard the awful verdict! I had vainly hoped that as avarice alone had prompted the assault, they would, since they had possessed themselves of every valuable about my person, at least have enough of humanity left to spare my life and allow me to depart in peace. With this assurance came a recollection steeped in wormwood and gall, as I thought of the shame and humiliation it would cost me to return empty-handed to those who had reposed unbounded confidence in my honor and ability, with no plea for the deficit save the relation of an incoherent and unreasonable story, upon which would be turned the cold, incredulous ears of a doubting world; for while I knew that my kind employers would believe my report, I could not forget that I had enemies as well, who would gloat over the cruel stain cast thus upon my name. 'But alas for human hopes!' I had not realized that I indeed must die so soon! I know not what I felt; words would but mock my effort! Such description as language could portray would be like the unsightly daub of a rude artist when compared with the exquisite pencilings of the great Original. I had never until that moment believed myself a coward; but if it was cowardly to grow pale with fear and sicken with horror, then surely I was a pitiable poltroon, as I lay upon the hard, rough boards and thought of my relentless doom. When I remembered that I should nevermore behold the bright-eyed

Phœbus climb the azure heights, nor hear the forest warblers sing the matin lays I loved so well; that ere a few short hours had flown away I would rest upon a softer couch, with no monument to my memory save unextenuated ignominy—since no friendly scribe was near to pen a line to those I loved, who would drop, as a tribute to my memory, a regretful tear!

"Their voices ceased, and soon all was silent as the tomb. Silent as the tomb! how suggestive the word! The regular breathing and an occasional snore told ere long that heavy slumber had settled upon the eyes that dare not look abroad at day upon the works of an outraged Maker. I made a desperate attempt to free myself. I might as well have tried to heave the universe. For a moment my pulses stopped, and my blood seemed freezing in my veins. A chilling numbness was creeping over me; I suppose I must have fallen into a light sleep, since I dreamed! visions no less frightful than my waking fancies. I was in Italy; had gotten separated from my party; been captured and held for ransom by the banditti. My friends were to come and release me on the morrow; my jailers had quarreled, and one of the gang, a treacherous Italian, swearing vengeance upon his colleagues, and resolving to cheat them of their booty, had stolen into the old tower in which I was sleeping, and poised a shining stiletto above my heart.

"I awoke with a start; the dark man was standing over me, gazing intently upon my face. My first impulse was to scream; he motioned me to silence. I obeyed. A cold perspiration was oozing from my forehead as I stared blankly at the figure before me,—the dream and reality being so strangely confounded as to fill me with a stupid terror.

"'Your name?' he asked in a low, stern voice, that recalled me to myself and demanded a truthful answer.

"'Elmer Fairfield,' I replied distinctly.

"'Your mother's?'

"'Ethel Ray.'

Myra looked up expectantly.

"'Her sister's?'

"'Bertha Ray.'"

"Bertha Ray!" exclaimed his companion in surprise.

"Yes; do you know her?" he asked, with brightening visage.

"My dearest friend and teacher," rejoined she feelingly.

"Then you were a pupil at Heywood?"

"Yes."

"Dear Aunt Bertha!" sighed the young man sadly; "her life has been indeed a checkered one; unselfish, useful and irreproachable. Would that the world were peopled by spirits alike blameless."

"But the robber," interrupted Myra, her excitement at its height; "you have not told me all."

"No," returned her companion sorrowfully, "you have as yet heard the preface only." Resuming the severed narrative, he continued: "No traces of the recent clouds lingered upon the Argus-eyed firmament, and white moon-beams streamed in through the dingy panes of the small window. I could not study his features by the dim illumination; but when he enquired the name of the sister, it was in softer intonations; and as I pronounced it, his head fell forward, as in shame or grief, and the great chest heaved, as stooping hastily, he loosed my shackles, and providing himself with a dark lantern, bade me follow him. I gratefully complied, and as I stepped cautiously out into the night, there arose from my heart a prayer of thanksgiving for this my providential deliverance. I walked on in silence by the side of the mysterious stranger, for I felt instinctively, that be he man or fiend, his intention was to forward my escape rather than to do me injury.

"I was pondering his words, his aristocratic appearance, his apparent knowledge of my family, and his singular behavior; wondering who he might chance to be, and above all, the cause of his present depravity, when we came to a secluded glade near the banks of the river, where he stopped, and placing the lantern where the light would fall full upon his face, suddenly confronted me.

"'Boy,' said he hoarsely, 'did you ever hear of Martin Willis?'

"I started at the name, but recovering myself, I answered in tones as dauntless as his own: 'Yes; Martin Willis is dead.'

"'Would to heaven that he was!' he cried in heart-wrung bitterness. The words were more a groan than an ejaculation, and the manly figure trembled, as though writhing under the stings

of a remorseful conscience, as torturous recollections swelled his bosom.

"The truth flashed, like a ray of light, upon my benighted senses, and a mingled loathing and thirst for vengeance naturally stirred my soul as I stood face to face with my uncle's murderer; but if I had entertained a feeling akin to hate for the dastardly villain I had been taught to believe him, my abhorrence melted into pity and forgiveness as I listened to the melancholy tale.

"'He had once been young and hopeful as myself, with a name as fair as the faultless brow upon which pain or care had never brooded. He had believed himself a high-minded and an honest man, and spurred by ambition, pictured in anticipation a glorious future, carving out for himself a bright career. He had met during the sunny days of rosy June the beautiful Bertha Ray, so joyous, fresh and winsome; had sought and won her, and believed her all that was pure and noble. He had loved her passionately, madly; and in their mutual attachment, there had been but one clog to their perfect happiness—an exacting disposition on his part and an accursed jealousy, which had wounded more than once the gentle heart of the being he adored. She had a dearly beloved and only brother, who had left, some years before, the land of his birth to seek his fortune in the far West. She longed for her lover to know and esteem him, and would descant for hours upon his virtues. He (Willis) residing some distance from her home, was debarred a too rigid surveillance respecting her numerous admirers. Their betrothal had lasted but a few short weeks, when upon one ill-fated eve, he had broken her heart, lost his own soul, and heaped the ashes of foulest infamy upon their blighted love.

"'He had promised to visit her at an early day, and thinking to give her a pleasant surprise, came in advance of the time determined upon. Twilight shadows were gathering, when, entering the garden which skirted the villa, he heard voices in a summer-house near by, and recognizing the ripple of mirth which answered a laughing observation from her companion, he stole on tiptoe to the side of the little arbor, and peered mischievously through the eglantine and honeysuckle that clustered about the latticed framework. He could have shrieked at the sight which met his astonished gaze. Upon a rustic seat sat Bertha—*his*

Bertha—her head leaning languidly against the shoulder of a manly figure, whose arms were dropped lightly about her waist. He stood rooted to the spot, stupefied with a nameless horror, as he watched through the hazy darkness their lover-like glances, and listened to their words of tender endearment.

"'Glancing shyly into his face, she asked roguishly: 'What would Martin say? He must not know this.'

"'The stranger made no reply, but taking the peach-blossom cheeks between his hands, pressed his lips to those raised temptingly to his.

"'Oh! the unspeakable agony of that moment! He was a man no longer, but a fiend and a madman! In a frenzy of rage and jealousy, he drew a pistol on his hated rival and vented his wrath in the bullet that pierced his heart. A scream accompanied the report, and he only looked back to see his victim expiring in the arms of the faithless creature he had blindly worshiped. Alarmed at the deed he had committed, he fled from the premises; but in his aimless Hegira, ran heavily against one of the field laborers, who knew and recognized him. He boarded the train and started for Texas. On the third day after his departure, he was taking dinner at a restaurant, when glancing over a morning's paper, he read the tragedy in detail. Great God! he had murdered *her brother!* This startling revelation admonished him to be wary, for in less than a week every state in the Union rang with the atrocious crime. Whither to go he knew not, since descriptions of his person and large sums offered for his arrest poured in on every hand.

"'It was all clear to him now; she, it seemed, had intended giving him a surprise, and for that reason had not apprised him of her brother's return. Such recollections but aggravated his despair, and more than once he would have ended bodily suffering in self-destruction, but that he cowered at the thought of being called to appear before the awful tribunal of an offended God.

"'He sought refuge in the Texas wilds, begging food at the scattered farm houses, and sleeping wherever he could find a shelter. The honest herdsmen eyed him suspiciously, and he hid himself in the forest, with no companion but a guilty conscience. At length, half starved, wretched and exhausted, he was taken prisoner by a company of brigands. They were about to deliver

him up for the reward of his capture; he begged hard for his life; they demurred, and finally relented upon one condition, that he would swear allegiance to their cause and become their leader. 'Their chief had recently died; they were coarse and illiterate, and dissatisfaction threatened a dissolution of the confederacy unless under an intelligent superior who could take charge of the finances and settle disputed questions.'

"'Drowning men catch at straws;' he dared not throw himself upon the mercies of the law, for who would believe his story? and he knew full well the only verdict that could be passed upon an assassination perpetrated deliberately and in cold blood. He could never hope to mingle with the outer world, since he bore the brand of a felon, which death itself could not erase; he could never hope to earn an honest livelihood, since his fame had spread abroad far and near; he was a stranger in a strange land, without money or friends, miserable and destitute; he was not fit to die. There was no alternative; he took the oath and entered upon his office. He had followed them in their rovings over the South and West, and they had, in time, grown to feel for him a kind of admiration and respect; but though he was their acknowledged head, he was, in reality, the most abject slave that ever breathed. He was afraid to offend them by word or deed, since whenever he did, they threatened to consign him to the keeping of his lawful guardians. Their crimes were undiscovered, while his was known in the four corners of the globe; he was entirely at their mercy and must cater to their whims. He never accompanied them in their nocturnal rambles, but was no less guilty than they; since, in their absence, he kept watch over their stolen lucre and subsisted upon their ill-gotten gains. He had contrived to have a hat, bearing his name, picked up on the river, and the report had gone out that he was dead; but Martin Willis lived still, and living, remembered!'

"My heart ached as he poured into my ears the demoniacal ravings of a tortured brain.

"'I guessed your lineage the moment my eyes rested upon you,' he said; 'later observation confirmed my conjecture. It was *her* face,' and muttering over 'it was *her* face,' he drew from his finger this ring," continued Elmer, calling the attention of his listener to an exquisite solitaire which she had noticed before, and placing

it upon mine, said bitterly: 'This was to have been our betrothal ring; keep it, and when you know that I am dead, give it to her and tell her all.'

"Taking from the bushes a small canoe, he let it slide noiselessly into the water, and bade me go. I reasoned and expostulated, implored him to fly with me. 'I would stand by and defend him, and he would find the world less harsh than he believed it. He could adopt a disguise, and seek some unknown land, where, in penitence and tears, he might atone for the errors of youth and later years.'

"He shook his head sadly. 'My words were idle; I knew not what I asked; I invited him to certain death, from which there was no escape. No, no; it was too late! too late! he was a castaway and a villain! lost beyond redemption! His comrades might, and probably would, substitute him for the missing prisoner should they suspect him of being an accomplice in the flight; he little cared, now that he had unburdened his conscience to one who would fulfil his last commission. He had exacted no promise, but had voluntarily trusted me; trusted me for *her* sake; I would not betray him?'

"I begged him to rest easy upon that score; 'I might condemn, but I was no traitor.'

"He had returned my money and all that they had taken from me, and I had no excuse for remaining longer. Taking the hand he hesitated to extend me, I turned to go. 'Goodbye, and may God pity you as I do,' I said fervently.

"A hot, blistering tear stole down the sunburnt cheek; and then, as though ashamed of the momentary weakness, he dashed away the gathering mist, and with a brow black as a thundercloud, pushed me rudely into the boat with the words: 'Go, boy, you will unman me! but—' the voice had softened, but was stern, earnest and impressive, as he uttered the solemn warning: '*Beware of jealousy.*'

"His form disappeared in the darkness, and I was left alone upon the river. You know the rest."

Myra was weeping silently; she had followed her lover in every phase of emotion, and suffered no less than he.

"Poor Miss Ray! poor robber!" came the distressed whisper.

"'God pity them both, and pity us all,
Who vainly the hopes of youth recall;
For of all sad words of tongue or pen,
The saddest are these—it might have been.'"

quoted her companion compassionately. "There is a touching sadness in the fallen estate of the wretched wanderer. Truly, 'the way of the transgressor is hard;' and when we witness the punishment—even in this life—of those who, when wrought upon by passion, are impelled to an act of violence, what *must* be the scourge of those who commit malicious crime!"

"You did not tell Captain Baley this?" recalling that gentleman's announcement upon occasion of the introduction.

"Most assuredly no; I merely gave him the simple facts, in order to account for the pitiable plight in which I was thrown upon his benevolence, without wearying him with particulars; which circumstance accounts for his very confident assertion: 'That the incident was without a parallel.'"

Myra had been deeply affected by the evening's recital; the moaning wind without and the flickering fire-light within seemed all too relevant to the theme. It verified what she had felt intuitively when at school, that behind the sunny cheerfulness of her warm-hearted little teacher there was a hidden history and a blighted youth. Strange she had never heard her mention this, her favorite nephew; and not singular either, since she never talked of self, seldom alluded to her family, and having no claims upon her confidence, it was not her prerogative to question her. It explained also her sensations at the time of his presentation, that his was the counterpart of some familiar countenance, as, since knowing of their near relationship, the likeness was remarkably striking.

"You know Aunt Bertha, *our* aunt," he said, with a seriousness not unusual with him, "so I shall transfer my charge to you. Something might happen to me, you know," he added with a sad smile, "in event of which, you will fulfil my trust."

She was loth to comply, but since he really wished it, she promised, not without unpleasant apprehensions, however, as she remembered whose hand the jewel had adorned before that of the present wearer. Within were traced the simple initials: "B. R.

and M. W.," circumscribing in their dainty curves a world of woe!

"Don't wear it," he resumed, guessing the tenor of her thoughts; "I am not superstitious, but—well! I have an idea that even gold and diamonds may become contaminated."

Myra was true to her word; and if the above disclosure haunted her slumbers, she was resolute in wearing a cheery smile in the presence of her betrothed, whose three day's stay at Violet Bank —more infinitely appreciated from the fact that long months must intervene ere they could hope to be similarly blest—passed all too soon for the happy lovers.

"Sweetheart!" whispered Elmer at parting, "when I come back I expect to find your affection undiminished and your confidence unwavering. Cannot you alleviate the pangs of separation by an assurance alike consoling? Are you quite certain that you trust me *entirely*, Myra?"

> "'In love, if love be love, if love be ours,
> Faith and unfaith can ne'er be equal powers;
> Unfaith in aught is want of faith in all,'"

she answered softly, with all the native fervor of her artless, trusting heart.

"Then 'trust me not at all or all in all,'" he concluded pleadingly.

CHAPTER XV.

LUCIFER.

ELMER had departed, but had left a faithful likeness, so life-like indeed, that Myra almost imagined him actually present, and in her earnest, impulsive fashion, would while away many a lonely hour conversing with the dumb photo, which, in her lively fancy, whispered soft replies and smiled at her girlish enthusiasm. Letters—the lover's carrier-dove—came and went, bearing on their snowy wings the tender message, each word of which breathed a sigh of tremulous transport, fresh from impassioned hearts.

Strange that Lionel should have been the first confidant of the new light that had come so unexpectedly into her bright, young life, implanting deeper roses in the cheeks whose delicate tinge had characterized the ambitious student of two years before, who had toiled with tired brain and aching head over books and easel, asking no higher benison than a smile of approval from the kind instructors whose esteem she strove so honestly to win. How she had been ravished by the spell of her self-imposed lucubrations! finding in her thought-pictures delight unspeakable, while her soul quaffed the ennobling waters of the Pierian spring. But they were gone now—those old days, with their trials, triumphs and aspirations, and a newer and more unselfish purpose held her in thraldom. She lived now to make another blest, and earth never looked more bright to the ardent girl whose every thought and faculty merged into the one grand sentiment that was to make life a long, uninterrupted holiday, a season of beatitude such as mortals ever paint and pine for, but never realize. Love had enveloped her in its fairy mantle, lending to her step a more airy grace, and a secret joy spoke in the music of her voice.

This, the most generous and considerate of friends, had listened to the confused story with brotherly solicitude, and when it was finished, "He has the first claims on your heart and confidence," he had said. "Be true to him, sister; he is worthy of your trust."

He had watched them together, had read their heart's most sacred pages and guessed the secret they so jealously guarded; had witnessed their happiness without a selfish pang, and in his thanksgiving for the subjugation of self, had mingled a prayer that the accepted lover might prove himself deserving of the blessing heaven had so graciously bestowed upon him. Disappointed in youth and in later years, he had learned to look for nothing else; but accepting his fate with sublime resignation, so perfect was the self-control of this quiet collected man, that whatever might have been the conflict within, it left no traces in the expressive countenance, beautiful sometimes in its mild serenity!

It was now the middle of February. The season had been one of unusual gayety, and the military company of S—— designed eclipsing all preceding festivities, in a grand ball to be given at B——, and anticipated for weeks beforehand by sundry merry belles, who regarded the event as one of more than ordinary in-

terest. The long-wished-for eve at length arrived, and no lighter heart or more beaming face graced the occasion than those of our heroine. Never had she looked more lovely, and if the mirror, before which she lingered for a moment before entering the dancing-rooms, reflected an exultant light in the kindling orbs, it was pardonable, since not born of personal vanity, but the thought of Elmer's exclamation of delight, could he only behold her.

The assemblage was large and select; the laugh, the jest, the genial mirth, swelled the social tide, and midnight was stealing surreptitiously upon the careless revelers. The enchanting strains of a string band were heard above the hum of voices, as the tired dancers tripped out to breathe the purer atmosphere of the more thinly populated halls or piazzas.

Myra had secured a post by an open window, and stood, surrounded as usual, and exciting, by her sprightly repartee, the admiration and applause of her gallant attendants.

"Would Wiss Marston give him her attention for a momeut?" petitioned Mr. Eustace, joining the envied group: There was a gentleman present, Mr. McLyons, who had met her while traveling and wished to renew the acquaintance, but feared she might not recognize him without a second introduction. Should he present him?"

"Miss Marston remembered Mr. McLyons quite well, and a second introduction was unnecessary."

"What wind had blown him hither?" Treasured reminiscences crowded thick and fast upon her, as the name recalled so vividly the brief, happy weeks she had spent in the land of flowers, not daring then to guess from whose presence her gladness sprung. Such pleasant recollections she was not long permitted to enjoy however, and despite her attempt at affability, she felt the disagreeable sensations she had experienced at the time of their first meeting instantly return, as he appeared before her, elegant and debonair, begging "the honor of her hand."

Thankful, for once, that she was engaged for the night, she replied to that effect, and the dancers being again upon the floor, was soon lost in the restless throng.

With a civil regret, he accepted the plea as a matter of course, and making no effort to secure another partner, established himself in the stand she had just quitted, and patiently awaited her return.

If he saw aught in her manner to evince dislike or a disinclination to the cultivation of his acquaintance, he was careful that she should not discover it, and set to work at once to overcome her prejudice. The profound attention with which he listened to her lightest words, the anticipation of her half-uttered wish, the air of admiration and respect with which he regarded her, and his total forgetfulness of all others, lent a charm to his address difficult to resist. He complimented her state, her county, her village, her friends, herself, and yet, so delicately withal, that she found it impossible to disclaim. Following up his advantage, he exerted to the utmost his powers of fascination, and contrived to monopolize the conversation to such a degree, that his less fluent competitors quietly withdrew, leaving the field uncontested in the hands of the distinguished stranger.

She might have argued away her misgivings, had she not imagined a sinister light in the eyes she never liked, and recalled the hauteur with which Elmer had met his familiarity and the cool sarcasm with which he had answered her inquiries respecting him. She felt depressed, uncomfortable, out of humor with herself and the persistent flatterer, and wondered inly why he should have selected her, above all others, as the recipient of his eloquence, which he must see was but ill appreciated.

He adverted to their meeting at the opera in a way that would have gratified a more impressible subject, and called to remembrance her own observations with a preciseness that proved, however trivial *she* might have deemed the incident, it had left upon his memory a deathless impress.

"You were with Fairfield when I saw you last."

"Yes."

"You met him in New Orleans?"

"No; on the steamer."

"Ah! then you are familiar with the history of his late adventure?"

"Yes. I witnessed the rescue, and was afterwards treated to a full account from his own lips."

"Indeed? You found him highly entertaining, no doubt. A remarkable story! a captivating young fellow!"

She might have truthfully declared, that, so far as her limited knowledge of him rendered her capable of passing judgment, he

was certainly a most agreeable gentleman, had she not deemed silence the more dignified response to his impertinent innuendoes.

He was right from Havana, and could impart any information she desired in reference to her *compagnon de voyage.*

He "supposed" she had heard of his approaching marriage.

No; she had not heard.

He could not vouch for the truth of the rumor; he had heard it discussed a good deal while there, and the bans had been published several weeks since. He thought the young lady had displayed a lack of discretion in permitting the latter, since, if upon the nuptial eve the bridal party were found minus a groom, she would not be the first confiding fair who had reckoned without her lover. Fairfield was a rare specimen of humanity,—handsome and gifted, with an inimitable skill in winning feminine hearts; a man to be envied above all envied men! Flirting had become with him more a passion than an art; it was a part of himself; he could not help it. Some people condemned; he pitied him. He did not believe that he premeditated wrong, but possessed a most unfortunate disposition, susceptible to that degree that he became hopelessly enamored of every new beauty he chanced to meet, and invariably loved the last better than all others combined. He appeared to have no control over his affections whatever, hence was not to be blamed if youthful nuns fled from a life made aimless and vapid through his faithlessness, and sought to immure a broken heart in the confined limits of a gloomy convent. He had met his present inspiration immediately upon his return from Louisiana; she was an orphan and an heiress, and had lately come to Havana to live with her guardian, who resided there. He had at once acknowledged himself a victim to her charms, and she, 'twas said, was no less infatuated with her poet suitor. His family, knowing well his besetting sin, had insisted upon a short engagement, and through their influence, he had induced his intended to fix an early day for the final glorification. Her friends had perfect confidence in his fidelity, and the bride elect, who was a mere school-girl, was supremely happy in the old story of "his first and only love," fond and trusting! Others were not so sanguine; for while her wealth alone, to say nothing of her personal attractions, would suffice to chain a less capricious heart, Fairfield, with all his shortcomings, was, in the main, well-mean-

ing and gentlemanly, and no one could accuse him of being mercenary. It was to be hoped that he would disappoint the gossips for once, and redeem his reputation by a speedy fulfilment of his promise. The paper containing the announcement had been handed him on the eve of departure, and if he was not mistaken, he had it with him. Perhaps she would like to see it.

Yes; she would like to see it.

Lucifer! what could she do but listen and assent! Oh! for the power to fell him to the earth and trample him in the dust! to tell him that each breath was a falsehood and his very presence pollution! How she despised the wily sycophant who had wrecked her Paradise, and smiled and fawned amid the ruin he had wrought! False! if *he* were false, then were truth a myth, and life itself a hollow cheat, a grim delusion!

How the remainder of the night was passed Myra could never tell; and how she managed to preserve her secret, was a mystery she could never fathom. It was all so confused, so like a troubled dream. She only knew that her head swam, the room swam, the world swam; the crowd seemed a disorderly concourse of giants and pygmies, and grotesque figures in piebald costumes cut fantastic capers and bobbed about the floor like goblins in a witches' dance. She was wildly gay, laughed louder than her wont, and when she did, the silvery ripple smote on her ear like a maniac's yell. She never fagged, never pleaded fatigue, never asked cessation from the dizzy whirl; and as she glided noiselessly by some isolated group, she heard, more than once, the involuntary exclamation, "How beautiful!"

Home and reflection! These are simple words, yet what an epitome of grief!

Mrs. Marston went herself to her daughter's room to take her some refreshments from dinner, but found her asleep. She knew she must be tired after her evening's dissipation, and it would be cruel to disturb her.

Asleep! would sleep never seal her eyes again!

How she would have chided herself for this ungenerous distrust, as the reproachful echoes of a tender voice—*his* voice—rang continually in her ear: "Then trust me not at all, or all in all!" But then the paper, the fatal paragraph, beyond which there was no

appeal! She essayed to read it. Her hand was unsteady, and the letters danced over the white sheet like the human forms of the night before.

Execrations upon the wretch who, with his deceitful, lying tongue, had maliciously destroyed her love, her faith, her peace! Sorrows must needs come, but how hateful the agent through which the blow is dealt!

This was weak, cowardly! She *would* read it. She would know the name of the enchantress who had wiled away her lover, and was, ere this, the bride of *him*, the one being on earth to whom she had consecrated her heart, her life! And yet, could she blame her, when she herself had been so foolishly fond, so artlessly confiding?

"We are pleased to announce that our gifted and esteemed young townsman, Mr. Elmer Fairfield, is soon to lead to the Hymeneal altar the beautiful and accomplished Miss Miriam Palmer. The marriage will take place——" She read no more.

"Oh! colder than the wind that freezes
Founts that but now in sunshine played,
Is that congealing pang which seizes
The trusting bosom, when betrayed."

Was she insane? Did her eyes deceive her? Oh, it could not be! it could not be! And she had believed him so high-minded, so noble—the very soul of honor, truth and chivalry! and that time and separation would strengthen, rather than lessen his affection! And she—poor unsuspecting dupe—how he must have laughed at her simple credulity! Oh, the shame and bitterness of that moment!

A smouldering fire burned invitingly upon the hearth. Slipping her feet into a pair of slippers and drawing a shawl about her shoulders, she arose and betook herself to her painful task.

Very slowly and carefully she collected every line, every trifle, every dear memento! They felt like a breathing soul, as she held them in her hand for one brief instant, then laid them in a heap upon the coals, ready to devour them. She watched the end with dilating eyes and quivering lip; then stooping, gathered the ashes, folded them in a dainty envelope and locked it in her shrine, along with other treasured relics.

'Twas finished! Throwing herself listlessly upon a chair, she pressed her hand to her throbbing temples, and with a deep-drawn sigh: "Ashes tell no tales! Ah, sweet memorials of a happy dream! As you were warmest and brightest in death, so was my all-consuming love! As the glow you shed about you, so was the halo around my future! But as you wither and to ashes fall, so perishes Myra's heart!"

CHAPTER XVI.

"A WOLF IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING."—FLORENCE.—AN UNOPENED LETTER.—OSCAR IN TROUBLE.—RODOLPHUS WOOING.

NEVER was guest welcomed with more sincere cordiality than was Henrietta, who arrived a week later. Her former visit had been so pleasantly remembered that she had for months looked forward to a more lengthy stay at Violet Bank, but had lingered by the bedside of her little brother, whose severe illness claimed all her sisterly cares. There was an infinite relief in her genial companionship, and her perpetual merriment and innate sense of the ridiculous were sureties against low spirits or reflection. The attractions of other visitors in and about the village were equally conducive to the reanimating of the pleasure-loving people of B——, and the winter gayeties were commenced afresh. Musical entertainments, readings and dancing parties were given by convivial hosts who sought to keep pace with their city cousins, all of which were as gratifying to Myra's troubled spirit as to the more mercurial temperament of her lively friend. There was a wicked exultation in the adulation and applause so lavishly showered upon her, which, in her calmer moments, she would have told herself was weak and unwomanly; but she did not care to think. What had she to do with the past, with its sweet, torturous recollections! It was dead: buried beneath the heart's tempestuous billows, and with it, all that was lofty and beautiful in life. Only the ghost remained to haunt her twilight reverie, and oft when pleasure's cup was brimming, a low voice or a tender strain awoke memories which thrilled her soul with anguish.

They seemed like visitants from another sphere, who had known her in an earlier and higher existence, and who, half in pity, half in derision, bewailed her sorrow. She felt as though she had been sporting among the clouds, where all was eternal sunshine, and awakening from her dream, found herself suddenly precipitated from the dizzy summit to the misty vales below. 'Twas then that she felt lowered in her own esteem. She was a hypocrite—a deceitful hypocrite—playing a part she did not feel.

She drove the whisperer from her. She must forget. Forget! oh that she might! And then the ring! She could not destroy it; it was not hers; she had no right. And the dreadful story! would she had never heard it! He had committed it to her keeping through love for his aunt, not for her. This she remembered with a pang. "Something might happen to him," he had said. Was it prophetic? She had promised—she would fulfill her trust. But had she no resentment? Aye; she was no lovelorn school girl to sigh and pine and droop in a cloister, simply because one man was false to his word. She would not wear a pensive air and melancholy visage, making herself a target for curious eyes and a theme for idle tongues. No, never! she would mingle with the world; would live and enjoy, as other dissembling mortals did. She would root out the old infatuation in later triumphs, would prove herself as fickle and as hollow-hearted as the perfidious creature who had destroyed her faith in human kind.

No society could have been more exacting of its votaries, and, excepting the hours allotted to slumber, demanded their undivided time and attention. Their spirits were acronycal, rising and setting with the stars. The mornings were dozed away, the afternoon pastimes slightly diversified, the ride or walk in the early gloaming, then *life* was come again.

The little *affaire d' amour* had, fortunately, never reached the public ear, Mr. Fairfield being looked upon merely as an acquaintance, who, like hundreds of others, found a brief sojourn at the Marston mansion highly agreeable. No suspicion of a dearer tie lurked in the knowing minds of the would-be guardians of their county's secrets, and no change was noticeable in the haughty beauty, unless, perhaps, she had grown more strangely fitful and alike indifferent to the admiration and envy which her ap-

pearance never failed to excite, an alteration loudly disapproved by her detractors and proportionally lauded by her admirers.

Mr. McLyons still lingered in the neighborhood, and was emphatically the lion of the day. He was the ruling spirit of every festal circle, and condescended to honor with his presence the routs, many of which were given exclusively for and in honor of him. He appeared to have bewitched the good citizens of S——, who were easily entangled in the gorgeous snares which his subtle eloquence wove about them, and the country was wild over the peerless stranger. Susceptible young ladies, with an undue fondness for admiration, were baited accordingly; and no sooner had they digested the dainty morsel than they became at once enchanted. He could count his conquests by the score, and sagacious mothers, who held in reverence the golden sands of Pactolus, were unsparing in their pains to win the regard of the wealthy Southerner.

His parents, he said, were natives of the Old Dominion, and he had longed for years to visit the land of his fathers and test the far-famed hospitality of "the dear old State." He had not intended to protract his stay, but tolerated by age and smiled upon by beauty, what man could do otherwise? There was an intoxication in her waters, which, once tasted, he found it impossible to tear himself away.

He was not long in finding his way to Violet Bank, for while Mr. Marston did not fall such an easy victum to his arts as did some of his neighbors, his courtesy to strangers was proverbial, and he had no reason for making an exception in the present instance.

Myra treated him very much as she did other gentlemen of her acquaintance, enduring rather than accepting his attentions. She dared not make an open avowal of her dislike, lest others might suspect what she was very loth to confess to herself, that notwithstanding the proud nonchalance—amounting sometimes to imperiousness—which she always assumed in his company, yet inwardly she feared him; for reason as she would, she could not divest herself of the idea that she was in some way instrumental in drawing him hither, and that his advent boded no good. She felt that he had, by some mysterious means, discovered her secret, and would feel no hesitancy in its disclosure, should it in any way for-

ward his designs. That she was in his power she could not deny; and that he was fully aware of his advantage, she read in the sinister smile and polite forbearance with which he met her coolness. If, as he asserted, his residence in their midst was only the gratification of a desire to visit Virginia, why should he have selected, above all other places, B——, an insignificant and comparatively out-of-the-way station? And the season, too! Had it been August instead of early spring, the allegation might have sounded more plausible. No, he came for a purpose; of that she felt as morally certain as that the end was in some way to affect her happiness. In other words, that he held the key to her destiny, and greatly enjoyed the satisfaction which the knowledge afforded him.

Henrietta had been informed, through their frequent correspondence, of the meeting with Elmer, her romantic recognition of the youth who had saved her life when a child, and his subsequent visit; but no hint of their betrothal had ever escaped her, that being held too sacred for even Henrietta's ears.

What Lionel's surmises might have been she could not tell; if he guessed that all was not right, he was too considerate to question her, but she sometimes fancied that she saw affectionate pity in the mild gray eyes that watched her artificial gayety.

When they were alone, Henrietta would ratttle on for hours in her happy, joyous fashion, of Oscar, their hopes and prospects; never dreaming that "dear Myra's silence," which she playfully upbraided, was owing to the fact that every word was a probe to the wounded heart of her abstracted listener, whose tender caress was an earnest of her sympathy, and a satisfactory assurance that she was not so wholly absorbed in self as not to feel an interest in the happiness of her friends.

Dimpling April had softened old winter's sullen frown, and, with smiles and tears had coaxed from him his sceptre. Wee violets and daisies raised their modest heads, and glancing shyly out upon the great world around, shrank timidly back, nestling close under the shadows of their more beauteous sisters, while a thousand tiny minstrels made the woodlands vocal with their exultant lay.

Henrietta had departed, and Myra was lonely and dispirited. The season was out of tune with her sadness. She was restless and discontented, and felt no part in the awakening life around

her. Her countenance did not reflect the smile of nature; her voice echoed not the song of the feathered chorister, and the day-beam's dissolving ray did not penetrate the snow-banks that had drifted about her heart.

Unhappy girl! She missed the whirl in which she had partially drowned thought and feeling, but much more the gleeful laugh of her cheery friend. A sudden resolve seized her. She had intended visiting Florence during the winter, but Henrietta's deferred visit had necessitated its postponement to the coming autumn. She would anticipate her promise, give her old school-felllow a surprise, and bring her home for the summer. Her wish was law, and a few days later saw her *en route* for Lexington, accompanied by her father, who would not suffer her to travel that distance alone.

Florence was "surprised but delighted." The season was over, of course; but she would, nevertheless, show the little Virginian that Kentucky was not a whit behind her own proud State.

Of her friend's popularity she soon had abundant proof. The news of her arrival was circulated among her acquaintances, and they were besieged with callers without number: æsthetic young ladies, who were adepts in the art of going into fits of ecstatic rapture over the most delightful commonplaces, and conversed with a brilliant volubility (a certain eclat, and peculiar finish of tone and gesture that defies description), forcing upon our poor heroine the mortifying realization that her education had been neglected, or else, her natural endowments were wofully defective. (They recognized in their idiom neither positives nor comparatives, but indulged their æsthetic penchant in æsthetic superlatives, each supported by an æsthetic adverb, and describing *of course*—an æsthetic subject.) Dainty young gentlemen, who parted their hair frightfully near the middle, gave their eyes a languid droop, lisped delightful nothings, declared that "Mith Marthton's thinging was divine, and wafted them to heaven upon ethereal breethes."

Florence held the position for which nature had adapted her. With a more than ordinary share of personal graces, suavity of manner irresistibly fascinating, and a disposition for universal favoritism which had characterized her at school, she was furnished with a safe passport through a world willing to be flattered;

but Myra feared that, in order to attain this indisputable belleship, she had an eye more to the wealth and number of her admirers than to their moral or mental culture. The circle to which she belonged was one of the gayest in the city, and she appeared to exist but for one end—the pursuit of ease and pleasure. Animation and amenity were donned along with her society robes, and worn no longer. Visiting hours over, she was indolent and peevish, impatient with the children, and disrespectful to her mother, who always repaid her doubly in her own coin.

Mr. Stillbury was an energetic, calculating business man, with no income except his monthly salary, wedded to the ledger over which he pored from morn till midnight; and with a large and extravagant family entirely dependent upon his daily exertions, had but little time to enjoy his home, where the want of means was a never failing source of dissatisfaction and ill-humor.

Myra felt uncomfortable, and often caught herself drawing comparisons between domestic life here and at Fenland Hall.

Oscar boarded in the house, and his even-temper exerted a salutary influence over her turbulent spirit. Their friendship of the summer before was renewed with tenfold interest on his part, since there were hundreds of queries to propound concerning the absent one, insignificant to others, but of ineffable importance to an anxious lover.

Among the many suitors for the hand of the youthful belle was one Mr. Horatio Dolittle, a widower of some fifty summers or thereabouts, whose smooth bald pate and green eye-glasses completed the dignity of his imposing mien. He bored Myra for an entire evening with bombastic compliments and learned dissertations upon themes of which she had never dreamt, leaving upon her mind the disagreeable impression that he was sounding the depth of her literary acquirements, clothing his ideas meanwhile in such august phraseology as would have confounded Noah Webster himself. She listened in hopeless bewilderment, venturing now and then a timid "yes" and an occasional bow of assent, with which proofs of her attention he was perfectly content, evidently preferring the music of his own eloquence to that of any other. More than once she cast an appealing glance at Oscar, who was provokingly unobservant, and while pretending to be wholly engrossed with the contents of a photograph album, every

face in which was as familiar as his own, the mischievous twinkle in the tell-tale eyes and twitch of the handsome mouth served greatly to increase her embarrassment.

"Well!" he asked with profound gravity, when the guests had departed, "how do you like Mr. Dolittle?"

"I think," she replied carelessly, her amiability having been fearfully tried, "that judging his actions by his words, his cognomen is an unpardonable misnomer, since, were his deeds but half as illustrious as his speech, he would vanquish the world. A more appropriate title in my opinion would be either 'Mr. Do*much*' or 'The Walking Lexicon.'"

Oscar laughed. "Why! you don't mean to say that you were not awed! flattered! dazzled!"

"Pedantry in writing is in bad taste, in conversation disgusting."

"So I think," dropping his light banter for a more respectful tone; "but I am not certain that the world—that is, when I say 'the world' I mean a majority of the human race—would not label you 'an innocent' for the assertion. What you term 'pedantry' passes with many people for wit; but in my own humble judgment, to adopt an original metaphor, ideas are like women, susceptible of over-decoration. Imagine a faded, withered cheek—like our old friend, Miss Lydia's, for instance—plastered over with rouge and 'Lily White,' and you have a commonplace topic 'done up' like a coronation address. Beauty of diction, as in all things else, I certainly admire; beauty, *true* beauty in language, as in dress, consists in fitness, ease and simplicity; and when at the expense of the meaning they were intended to convey, words become like soap-bubbles, lost in their own inflation. Mr. Dolittle is a prominent political leader, and has many admirers, I assure you, who would follow him blindly whithersoever he directed, his cleverness being esteemed proportionately with the comprehension, or rather *lack* of comprehension, of his partisans. Learned he undoubtedly is, but by no means extraordinarily intelligent, and therein lies the error; the terms are too often confounded; for while some natural capacity is necessarily essential for the acquisition of knowledge, a person of very meagre talents may, by earnest and persistent application, stow away a vast amount of information.

"I anticipate your reply," as she would have interrupted him; "you would say that 'they who are least gifted deserve most credit;' true, yet the first and most important lesson of all should be when and where to exhibit their attainments.

"The world likes to be humbugged, always did and always will," continued this sage of twenty-one; 'I remember having this conclusion very forcibly impressed upon me when a boy by a little incident which, though foolish enough in itself, amused me greatly at the time. My uncle, who was a very successful physician, was a plain, unassuming man, entirely candid with his patrons, and as soon as he found his services unnecessary, always dismissed the patient, and never resorted to bread pills to eke out a bill. He was sent for upon one occasion to see a nervous, hysterical woman who had become alarmed at the little specks which had settled about the wound after bleeding, and had fretted herself into such a fever, that by the time of his arrival she was desirous of having the arm amputated at once. My uncle was a bit of a wag; he enjoyed a laugh at her expense, assuring her that her fears were groundless, since the discolorations she noticed were caused merely by the late depletion, and would disappear after a short while; still, if she would feel better satisfied, she might apply a soft poultice.

"This did not appease her, however; on the contrary, it angered her; she had made up her mind to be sick, and sick she intended to be. No sooner had he quitted the house, than she dispatched a messenger for a rival practitioner who had recently come from abroad, adopted new terms, new remedies, and experimented indiscriminately upon such subjects as fell in his way. His fame was being rapidly extended, especially by the undertakers, who were indebted to him for a large percentage of their custom, and she resolved to test his skill. He came in great haste, and scarcely had his eyes rested upon her, than raising his hands in an attitude of horror, with fearful distortions of his portentous visage, he exclaimed: 'Why, my dear Madam! you have an ecchymosis! you must apply an emollient cataplasm.' The woman was entirely unlettered; my uncle lost his practice from that day."

Florence was the first to recover from the mirth evoked by the anecdote. With a slight shrug of the rounded shoulders and a coquettish toss of the shapely head, she asked in pretended dis-

pleasure: "Come, my satirical pair! what apology have you to offer for your impertinent criticism of my—perhaps my—accepted lover?"

Myra looked dismayed; Oscar gave himself up to unrestrained risibility, a contagion quickly communicated to his companion, as Florence repeated with studied precision his fifth and last courtship, which she declared to be a perfect facsimile, *verbatim et literatim*, of the first, second, third and fourth, a set speech through which he had won his first wife. "The hateful old thing! she wondered if he *did* have the vanity to suppose that *she* cared anything for him! But oh! how humble he did get sometimes! and plead with an eloquence truly divine! He even had the assurance to want to kiss her hand. Just think of it! to kiss her hand! the old goose! she would sooner submit to the caress of a porcupine or hippopotamus."

May had stolen upon them unawares, when an incident occurred that tore down the frail defence which Myra had erected about her in the first bitter moments of her unmitigated sorrow, leaving pride no staff to lean on, and wounded love no weapon with which to do battle with the enemy waging continual warfare in the heart she thought to crush. On going down one morning she found one among her letters, whose familiar address well-nigh robbed her of self-control. It bore the Havana postmark; had been taken out at B——, and forwarded. Florence's comments upon her agitation recalled her to herself, and laying the missive aside unopened, she turned to dispatch the meal which she scarcely tasted.

"Florence must please excuse her; she could not go out with her as she had intended; her head ached, oh! so dreadfully! she would go to sleep and be well and fresh on her return."

Florence demurred: "She would remain with her."

"Oh, no! she must not—indeed she must not. She should feel very unhappy to think that she had spoiled her morning's enjoyment, and rest upon such conditions would do her no good. She would be better off alone: Please to go."

With a regret and an affectionate kiss, her friend tripped out into the street. She watched her graceful figure until lost to sight, and then, like one in a dream, sought refuge in their own boudoir, where, without fear of intrusion, she might struggle with

this last and severest of all trials which she had yet been called upon to endure.

For full an hour the conflict lasted, as she sat gazing through scalding tears at the priceless treasure which she held so tightly in her tremulous clasp. Oh, need I tell the writer's name! The first line she had received from his dear hand since that memorable night upon which she had been made an unwilling listener to the story of his disloyalty.

In the first moment of glad surprise her heart had given a wild, exultant bound, bursting the icy barriers that sealed its fountain; but ere the warm spray had scarcely started, 'twas congealed in the source from whence it sprung.

"He had wavered, but loved her still;" and with the thought came a pang of mingled mortification and resentment. "She was no idle toy, to be picked up and cast aside whenever some more radiant star dawned upon the horizon of his capricious fancy. And besides—even though she were willing so to humble herself, to forgive him all—she could not call him back when, by so doing, she would break another heart, perhaps more sensitive than her own."

Reason refuted this first supposition. "No, no; he was, ere this, the husband of another, and wrote to ask forgiveness and tell her of his happiness. It was cruel, heartless; and she was so weak! oh, so weak and unwomanly!" It was with superhuman resolution that she restrained the nervous fingers which threatened, ever and anon, to tear the seal and know the worst. "She would not. He should not so triumph over her. But if aught under heaven could make her forget pride, indignation and self-esteem, it would be that face and that voice, which had expanded her young heart in the sunlight of love—only to nip the tender blossom in the cold, biting frosts of disappointment.

"She must be firm. She must tear the loved image from her memory. They were parted, and parted for ever. Fate, like a darkling river, rolled between. She must forget, for he was lost to her for ever. She would never see him more; never! never!" and the deeps of her soul rung with the echo, "Never! never!"

The flood-gates were opened, and she wept! Wept because she felt that her words were vain, and that she loved him no less now, than when, upon that scented eve, she had plighted him her troth and promised to trust him—ay, even unto death!

"Oh, Elmer!" she moaned, "why would you mock me thus!" Why would you add another weight to the load of grief already mine! I could have forgiven all but this!"

Her sun had set; the night was upon her, but no pitying stars peeped forth to shed their timid lustre through the gloom into which her soul had sunk. There was no relief but in that refreshing fount, from which welled tears akin to the drops which summer dews shed over the death of some blighted flower.

She was calmer when she rose. Her resolve was formed and could not be too quickly executed. Florence was out shopping, after which she was to pay a round of calls and would not be back in several hours. Taking a last look at the unopened letter which had occasioned her so much suffering, she sealed it in another envelope, directed it and placed it in her pocket, thankful that she had been able to resist the impulse which had come so near mastering her. Then she bathed her face, smoothed her tumbled tresses, donned her hat, slipped out through the front passage and gained the street unobserved. The post-office was only a few blocks off. She re-entered the house by the same door. The children were at school, Mrs. Stillbury busy in her sewing-room, and no one was wiser for her brief absence.

What suspicions may have been forced upon Florence by her singular conduct of the morning were wholly dispelled, when, upon her return, she found her quietly reading, to all outward appearances, the same Myra of former days.

Oscar was late for tea, and unusually quiet throughout the evening. Myra thought that he looked troubled, unhappy. This, however, she should have attributed to the unsettled state of her own mind, had not Florence rated him playfully upon his want of appreciation of their charms, with an arch reminder that he was not making himself agreeable.

The reception of Elmer's letter had rendered her present life not only distasteful, but unbearable. Novelty's sparkling cordial had thrown off its effervescence, leaving only the insipid lees. She wished to return home. Florence preferred visiting her in July or August, so she wrote at once to her father to come for her. A week went by, during which Oscar's mental disorder was each day more noticeable. She longed to know the cause of his perturbation, but feared he might think her presumptuous and inquisitive.

It was her last night in Lexington, and many of the acquaintances formed during her stay had called to bid her good-bye. He waited impatiently until they had made their final adieux, and then laughingly asked if she could not spare him a few moments before retiring, as he wished to see her particularly.

Her reply being in the affirmative, Florence took the hint good-naturedly, and, with a merry jest, left the parlors for what she termed "the mysterious interview."

Never had she seen him look half so wretched, as when, throwing himself doggedly upon an ottoman at her feet, he confessed all. "Two weeks before he had received from Henrietta an angry, reproachful note, with which she returned his letters, giving, as a reason for his dismissal, his engagement to Florence. She had not condescended to enter into particulars, but he inferred that she had obtained her information through Miss Lydia Philips, who had been spending the winter in Lexington, and who had always despised him (having a natural antipathy for youth), and had not entertained for Henrietta the kindliest feelings in the world, especially since Jerome's attentions to her (Myra), which she ascribed no doubt to some scheme of the former's to lure him from her 'dear little sister' (Miss Janet), for whom he had, in reality, never professed the slightest partiality. He had not thought that Henrietta could be so weak as to allow herself to be influenced by the idle gossip of a notorious mischiefmaker, and the misunderstanding might never have occurred, had he not, in one of his letters, mentioned in a teasing way Florence's unrivaled belleship, with the remark, that were he unfettered and fancy free, he too might be in danger of falling a victim to her charms. He had only meant to joke her, never dreaming for an instant that she could possibly fancy him in earnest. He had been shocked and wounded when at last he comprehended her very incoherent note, and had written at once explaining all: he had never received a line in reply, and was almost crazed with anxiety. How such a rumor could ever have originated, he could not think for the life of him; certainly through no word or act of his, and he was sure Miss Florence would feel anything but flattered. They were necessarily thrown much together; he admired and liked her, but he had never loved but one woman, and were a world of beauties submitted to his choice, she were fairer in his eyes than all others,

of whatever nation or clime. He *had* hoped that Henrietta had known him long and well enough to be above that weakness, jealousy, which had broken so many hearts."

Myra winced at the home-thrust; she had been an attentive and sympathetic listener: "The same old story! Was there no happiness in human love! had confidence no abiding place!"

"The old vixen!" he muttered, again adverting to Miss Lydia.

Such words were strangers to his lips, and their very utterance convinced her that he had been tried beyond endurance.

"Hush!" she said reprovingly; "what naughty words you are saying!"

"Virago, then! Were she a man, I would know how to deal with her, but being a woman ——."

"What will you do?" with a sad smile.

A sudden gleam of his fine eyes illumined the frank, expressive countenance upturned to hers, when, as though some comforting idea had flashed upon him, he exclaimed excitedly: "Foil her with her own weapon—words!"

"May I help you?"

"My dear friend! how can I thank you!" clasping her hand impulsively.

"Then listen. Henrietta loves you, Mr. Maurice; of this I am well assured."

"You think so?" brightening.

"I know it; and I do not intend that two of my best friends, whose mutual happiness I know to be so seriously concerned, shall fall out about a mere trifle, and make themselves miserable for life; that is, if any effort on my part can repair the breach. She naturally feels piqued, and cannot bring her independent spirit to the humiliation of asking forgiveness; on these grounds I account for her silence. She will be more reasonable by and by; and since she will not listen to you, perhaps she may treat me less unkindly. I shall write to her immediately upon my arrival at Violet Bank, and do all in my power to bring about a reconciliation. Can you trust the affair in my hands?"

"Indeed I can!" was the hearty rejoinder; "I had intended asking as much, but you have anticipated my wish. Your words inspire me with new hopes; I have longed for some days past to unburden my heart to some one, and you have no idea how much

better I feel already. You seem to understand my feelings so perfectly, and administer remedies so skillfully, that were I not confidently advised to the contrary, I should say that you yourself had once been in a similar category."

Another home-thrust.

"This 'weakness,' as you term it, you think unworthy of her; perhaps it is; at the same time I would admonish you to be very tender in your reprehension. A woman may be won, but never driven; and it were easier to melt an iceberg with hailstones than a woman's pride with angry words when once she imagines herself slighted."

"You shall find me humility personified. I shall write again, and if that brings no more satisfactory result than the last, I shall leave this hateful place, go straight to her house and compel her to hear me. I wish now I had never left her; it was for her sake that I did, because I fain would save her from poverty, and could better my finances by coming. The sordid dust! what do I care for it without *her!* I would not give my sweetheart for the wealth of the universe, and this diamond eyed monster, Mammon, has been a clog to more than one man's happiness."

His excitement gradually subsided under her cheering words, and the hopeful smile with which he accompanied the pleasant "good-night" attested the success of her attempt at consolation.

Without the door knelt a slight, girlish figure, one ear pressed close to the key-hole, her face livid with rage and her small hands clenched with suppressed passion. She arose as the conference ended, and glided back to her chamber as stealthily as she had left it. "Ah! my warm-hearted little friend! you shall rue the day you came between me and the man I love. To be thwarted! duped! by *her!* I might have won him but for this officious interference! I will have my revenge! I will have my revenge!" she hissed, as the door closed behind her.

Great was Myra's surprise when, upon her return, she found McLyons still in B——. This circumstance alone was sufficient to redouble her apprehensions, notwithstanding his avowed plea, that he had become so attached to the place and people, that he preferred spending the summer in his present locality to recreating at the springs, as he had done for ten years past; but when taken

in connection with the abrupt suspension of Elmer's letters, the fact of his having volunteered the information concerning his intended marriage, the former's undisguised dislike and the forwarded billet—of the contents of which she was totally ignorant—it filled her mind with wild suspicions and indefinite hopes which she dare not foster. Being widely known and universally popular, she felt sure that the papers of his native city would mention an event of such general interest; she had watched them eagerly, devouring every paragraph in the list of Hymeneals, but the name she sought was not there.

"What if there existed between these two some family feud, and this McLyons was laboring to effect some secret vengeance! What if the announcement was a forgery, an ingenious fabrication to excite her jealousy, insuring thereby the dissolution of their engagement!" A thousand possibilities presented themselves, aggravating rather than allaying her disquietude.

"What if Elmer had been ill, nearly dead perhaps! and she had never written him a line! Suppose he had grown impatient, and written upon his recovery to ask an explanation of her silence! and she had returned his letter unopened, without a word! Was he true? Did he love her still? How could she ever ask his forgiveness! he would never allow her an opportunity. Would he come back? no; he was proud and sensitive; he would never subject himself to a second slight at the hands of one whom he must believe false! heartless! unworthy of his love and trust!" The thought was agonizing.

It was during one of these spells of mental morbosity that an unlooked for diversion caused her to forget, for the time, her distressing perplexity, and furnished a week's merriment for the entire domestic staff.

Mr. Henry's friendliness had known no abatement, and Mr. Rodolphus' attentions had been equally unremitting. After conning the matter well, the latter had very prudently concluded that the contemplated proposal must be delayed no longer. She was apprised of this, when, upon entering the drawing-room one evening, she found him sole occupant, with sundry additions to his elaborate toilet, and not a slight overplus of jewels and perfumery.

From his obvious embarrassment, she soon discovered that he

was pondering a question of unusual moment, his hands and feet being painfully intractable, as he fidgeted uneasily in his chair, sighed heavily and gazed in speechless agony at the statue-like figure before him. In vain he strove, by every ruse which his clumsy ingenuity could devise, to broach the awful theme, his advances being met with an unblushing coolness that would have daunted a less confident suitor. Her haughty indifference puzzled and irritated him, and at the end of an hour, Mr. Sims had become desperate.

He rose, crossed the room, gulped down two goblets of ice-water, came back and reseated himself. Then he crossed his legs, adjusted his cravat, stroked his mustache and twirled his chain.

With three successive ahems! as a proem to the forth-coming declaration, he began, in great agitation: "You—ah!—ahem! Really, Miss Marston—you—ah!—that is—you can't be ignorant as to my—intentions."

Myra's color had been rising slowly, half in anger, half in amusement. An ominous silence followed, which Mr. Sims was at a loss to interpret.

"You—ah!—ahem!—that is—ah!—really—" Here he became frightened at his own voice, and came to an abrupt pause.

His breath came thick and short; perspiration stood out in large beads upon the ruddy brow, and his eyes looked wistfully liquid, as, drawing from his pocket the famous bandana, he mopped his forehead vigorously.

The clinking of glasses warned them of the presence of a third party. Myra knew, without looking around, that the intruder was Aunt Jemima with a waiter of refreshments. Mr. Sims' perception was not so correct, however. Thankful for the avenue of escape so unexpectedly opened to him, he rose in great haste, seized the hand of the venerable domestic, and shaking it heartily, exclaimed, with unfeigned cordially, "How do you do, Mrs. Marston? I am glad to see you!"

The astonished Ethiopian stared at him in open-eyed amazement.

It was rude, ill-bred and unfeeling. She could not help it; she was, for the time being, insensible alike to either. Myra leaned her head upon the stand at her side and fairly screamed with laughter.

This last unpardonable indignity recalled him to himself. Over-

whelmed with confusion, as he realized his ludicrous blunder, he rushed from the apartment, upsetting three chairs in his unceremonious exit, snatched his hat from the rack, and with a smothered oath, fled from the house in a frenzy of rage.

CHAPTER XVII.

TWILIGHT'S WITCHING HOUR.

SOL had closed his golden eye, and lain him down to rest:
'Twas twilight's witching hour:
The hour when maidens, young and shy,
Are wont to steal from home, hard by,
And seek some sheltered nook or dell,
To revel in its magic spell.
'Twas twilight's witching hour.
The day in gorgeous splendor dies,
As on her ruby couch she lies,
And swift her soul its flight will wing,
When night her sable pall shall bring.
'Twas twilight's witching hour.
The mocking-bird no more did stay
To carol soft its roundelay,
But to its callow young had flown,
To shelter them from wind or storm.

'Twas twilight's witching hour:
The lilies all had said "good-night,"
Their faces fair had hid from sight,
And said: "We'll meet again at light,
When Aurora tips the Eastern height."
'Twas twilight's witching hour.
The jasmine fair, the scented rose,
Had gently sunk to sweet repose.
In sportive glee the leaflets played,
While zephyrs sighed beneath their shade.
'Twas twilight's witching hour.
The evening dew did pensive weep,
And in her tears the flowers did steep,
Till fragrance soft upon the breeze
Was wafted o'er the wooded leas.

'Twas twilight's witching hour:
The evening waned, till by-and-by

Nox arose from throne on high,
And in her sombre garb revealed
A crescent moon upon her shield.
The owl in yonder rifted oak,
Welcomed the hour with dismal croak.
Fair Luna smiled and brightly glimmered,
The wee stars blushed and shyly shimmered.
Beneath a willow's leafy boughs
A maiden fair had sought repose;
And chestnut curls anon did rest
'Pon hand as fair as ocean crest.

Myra was lost in reverie. She had wandered to this secluded bower, now more than ever dear, since in its calm, sweet solitude, she might mourn the death of young love's first promise, to conceal which had become her daily study. The scene, the hour and the soft stillness soothed her troubled spirit, and oft, when dew-drops bathed the infant blossoms, sighs from her lacerated bosom arose, like incense, to the skies. Unconscious of the beauty around her, her thoughts were far away, for through memory's vista gleamed one form, one star, whose rising and setting had begun and ended that brief, bright and higher phase of earthly blessedness.

She took up the guitar, which lay neglected beside her. A light prelude floated out upon the night, whose every vibration seemed a whisper of *him*. She laid it aside, impatiently, lest she might give involuntary utterance to her long-suppressed emotions, for

Every cadence, every strain,
Each ended but in Elmer's name.

The words arose to her lips unbidden, as the harrowing recollections which inspired them:

"Ah! Elmer, I have loved you well;
Ay, loved you more than words can tell;
You little knew, you little guessed,
The love, the joy, that thrilled my breast!
To hear once more those words of love,
Like angels' whispers from above,
The past I'd fling to Lethe's tide,
With all its cruel doubts and pain;
Could humble e'en my haughty pride,
To bring my lover back again—

For, false or true—I love you yet;
I love you, and can ne'er forget!"
The zephyrs caught the soft refrain
And echoed back the words again:
"For, false or true—I love you yet;
I love you, and can ne'er forget!"

A light foot-fall arrested her attention. She started; she turned; she screamed. A tall manly figure stood behind her—a mere ghost of his former self—pale and haggard in the silvery moonbeams: 'Twas Elmer!

CHAPTER XVIII.

A RECONCILIATION.

MYRA would have been at a loss to define her emotions, as she listened, with timid eagerness, to

ELMER'S STORY.

His voice acted like an enchanted strain, exorcising the cruel doubts that had haunted her fevered brain, leaving in their stead a tremulous joy, a feeling too vague, and yet too deep for utterance.

She did not ask if he had been ill: the pale face, which had startled her in the starlight, was the picture of health and youthful bloom when compared with the wan, sunken cheeks upon which she now gazed, as he stood beneath the flood of light which the glittering chandelier threw over the apartment. A strange lustre crept into the midnight orbs as they returned the searching gaze; and as their heavy fringes swept the white cheek, their black looked blacker, and his entire aspect was so singularly cadaverous as to cause her to question whether it was not, after all, an hallucination, or whether she was, in reality, conversing with her lover or his spirit.

"You have been ill;" she said brokenly, when at length she could command her voice, "and I have been so—so unjust!"

"Yes, I have been ill—very near death's door," he replied, in his low, earnest tones, "but I have traveled the road so often that it

has grown quite familiar, and has ceased to appall. Bodily pain is a sore affliction, but when compared with mental anguish, it sinks into insignificance and contempt. God only knows what I have suffered! Myra! oh Myra! how could you have so wronged me?"

She made no effort at defense, but tears fell thick and fast beneath his reproachful glance.

"There, I have pained you!" he cried, regretfully; "I was harsh, unkind; forgive my hasty speech. You did not know—how could you! that, stricken down by sickness, I tossed in feverish delirium and raved of Myra. You did not know how, when the great crisis was past and my thoughts were turned once more to life, I watched the mail with hungry eyes, and threw it from me impatiently, in bitter disappointment, when that for which I looked, that for which I pined, that for which I hoped, was not there. You did not know how, when my body was being nourished with the choicest dainties which friendship and affection could provide, my poor heart was starving for a line, a word, of sympathy and remembrance from the being most dear to me on earth. What to think I knew not. I was more than wretched, and doubly so, that, in my then feeble state, I could do nothing but wait.

"It was during this period of anxiety and suspense, that in attempting to while away the tedious hours in the perusal of some old periodicals, I chanced to read in one of our home journals of my intended marriage. Words are inadequate to express my surprise and apprehension as I read it again and again to be sure that my eyes were not playing me false. My first thoughts were of you, and the next for the solution of the mystery. No one else was in the room, and before my mother re-entered, I had arrived at an explanation, which, having found a clew, was the simplest and most natural imaginable. I questioned her in regard to the erroneous announcement; she declared herself profoundly ignorant of the whole affair, but readily agreed with me as to the manner in which the mistake had probably occurred. So deep and all-absorbing had been her solicitude for her 'dear boy's recovery,' that she had not given a thought or a care to aught else, and was, in consequence, but little better posted than myself in reference to what had transpired during my illness. That day was destined to be one of surprises, and to add to my discomfort, I heard accidentally, in the course of the evening, that McLyons

was in Virginia. The exact locality which he had deemed fit to honor with his presence was unknown, and that fact, alone, confirmed my fears and suspicions, and made me infinitely more miserable than before. The circumstance was mentioned casually, among other items of interest, by a couple of lively associates, who, impelled by a desire to beguile me of my melancholy, alluded in a laughing way to my deferred nuptials, making the incident a subject of playful jest, that while I languished upon a bed of sickness, I had been supplanted by another who had stolen my expectant bride. What they meant as a joke was anything else to me however, and though their honest endeavor to provoke a smile failed signally, I was not long in admitting that their visit, if not efficacious, was highly beneficial.

"I spent a sleepless night, my strength returning with my increasing doubts and kindling indignation. To the astonishment of my nurses and medical attendants, I declared, on the morrow, my determination to sit up. They disapproved and expostulated, but I carried my point. I asked for writing materials, and requested to be left alone. I expected foul play, so wrote a full explanation of the rumor which I was sure had reached your ears, telling you of my illness and begging a word in return to cheer and console.

"Again I watched and waited. After long, weary weeks the wished-for billet at length arrived; I tore the seal in an ecstasy of joy, to behold what? my own letter, unopened, without apology or reproof! I could not credit what I saw; I could not believe that the love, which a few months before had made me blest, could so soon have changed to indifference or contempt. I could have borne anything better than this; angry vituperations you might have heaped upon me! anything but silence and disdain! I felt wounded and humiliated, but I did not give way to passion and say unkind things of you, for I never questioned your fidelity—no, not for an instant; I had more faith in you than you had in me. You doubtless believed me the falsest and most despicable of men, and I could not know to what extent your mind had been poisoned against me. I could not blame you, for appearances were sadly against me, and our acquaintance was so brief and limited; but I could not, and *would* not give you up without a struggle. I left home as soon as circumstances would permit, resolving to

travel until I found you, and if proof was needed, let my waste figure vouch for the truth of my words. I heard you under the willow, and could not withstand the temptation of stealing upon you. I witnessed your emotion, and listened to your impassioned improvisation; it was mean, unfair; but you are not angry, Myra?"

He paused, as though he expected a reply. Shame and contrition had chained her tongue; she could not trust herself to speak, but she looked at him beseechingly, as though she would recommend herself to his clemency, and entreat him, at least, to spare her the mortifying rehearsal of her own follies.

He seemed to understand the mute appeal, for he adverted no more to the unfortunate recitative, but in tones of mingled pride and tenderness, resumed: "Having proved my love, let me vindicate my honor. Listen! I was not always what I am now, Myra, a portionless heir. My father was accounted a wealthy man, with but two children, Juliet, my beautiful sister, and myself. Ten years ago he removed to Havana, where he died after a seven years' residence. The exact condition of his finances was unknown to us at the time. We knew that he had suffered severe losses from a fall in railroad stock, in which he had speculated largely, and that the line of steamers in which he was a copartner had been greatly damaged by storms and fires; but we did not allow the fact to disturb us, deeming his other property more than sufficient for our needs. Twelve months after his decease, upon settling up the estate, it was found that he had left his family—well, not exactly penniless—but with what seemed a mere pittance to those who had been reared in wealth and luxury. Poor Juliet! The blow was felt most by her, and from that day she was a changed being. She was a lovely girl, and though five years my junior, we had been confidants from childhood, scarcely enjoying a thought which was not communicated to the other. She was brilliant and accomplished, but in one great essential she was wofully deficient,—she lacked the courage and moral fortitude to grapple with adversity and prove herself equal to the reverses of life. In looking back, my former existence seemed like a long, unbroken dream; but brought face to face with poverty, I awoke my dormant energies, cast behind me my poetry and my art, and set to work to retrieve my fallen fortunes. Not so with my fair

sister. She could not gain her consent to give up the gay, glittering world in which she had shone so long. She brooded continually over her imaginary wants and privations, making herself quite miserable because she could not emulate her quondam associates. It grieved me immeasurably to see her so weak—cowardly, I called it—and much more our dear mother. Up to that time she had been betrothed to a young barrister, Hugh Cavendish by name, and a noble fellow he was, with everything to recommend him to a woman's favor—with one lamentable exception: *he was poor!* Poor, proud and ambitious, striving manfully for the laurel wreath which must ultimately crown his ardor and genius. Their inequality of fortune had long been a source of unhappiness to his haughty soul, and he would not permit her to assume his name until he had won both honor and fame. She discarded the man she loved, upon the alleged plea, that she was unfit to cope with poverty: 'She was, so far as usefulness was concerned, as helpless as an infant. She would be only a burden to herself and him. She could never wed a poor man.'

"I rebuked her angrily. She only wept. 'Brother,' she said, 'you are cruel and unjust. It is for his sake, more than for my own. I would be nothing but a trouble and incumbrance. I can never be a poor man's wife.'

"She spent the following winter with friends in the city of her birth, where she met this millionaire, McLyons. I was informed of their engagement when he accompanied her home, the ensuing spring. Why it was, I could not tell; I could not then, and cannot now, give any plausible reason for my dislike; but it was instinctive and inveterate. He knew his enemy, and returned my hatred with every honest throb of his deceitful heart.

"I remonstrated and pleaded with her. She had steeled herself for the ordeal, and turned a deaf ear to my entreaties. 'Her mind was made up,' she said, 'and nothing could change her.'

"When I found her inexorable, I tolerated him for her sake, because I would not, by open hostility, add a feather's weight to the unhappiness in store for her; and though I have felt my smouldering wrath boil within me under his patronizing insolence, my affection for her has ever been a check to an impetuous outburst. Summer and autumn sped by, during which he visited her at intervals, and, after several postponements of the marriage,

the lover became impatient. As time went on, I was not slow to discern that Juliet, despite her obstinate pride, evinced a decided reluctance to redeem her pledge. This I welcomed as a happy omen. I fell on my knees and implored her, as never man prayed for woman's love, for the sake of all that she held dear in heaven and earth, to consider well before she took the irrevocable step, to be true to herself. Her better nature triumphed at last, and the day before I left, I had the satisfaction of placing her hand in that of the man who adores her, and into whose care I cheerfully gave the sister I idolized.

"Upon being finally rejected, McLyons very justly credited me with his dismissal, which circumstance was well calculated to increase the malevolence with which he had ever regarded me. He loved her after a fashion; he was proud of her beauty and accomplishments, and it would have been gratifying to his vanity to exhibit her to the world as his wife. He accepted his fate like the fawning hypocrite he is, but with a mental reservation, no doubt that he would reward me for my pains.

"Those bent upon revenge are seldom left long without means. He had heard, through Juliet, of our engagement. I fell ill before he left Havana, and with the conviction that I would never recover, he sought you out, to shatter your trust with gilded falsehoods, and embitter my last moments with the belief that you had forgotten, or else had never cared for me. Chance forwarded his designs; there is another family of Fairfields residing on the same street, and only a few blocks from our home; they are distant relatives of ours, and the young gentleman in question is Mr. *Elber* Fairfield, who married Miss Palmer a few months since. Our names, being so nearly the same, are frequently confounded, and the type-setter, through haste or carelessness, substituted mine for his. Armed with this, success was sure; so our wily friend at once set out, eager for the consummation of his malignant scheme. So it was that our mutual happiness hung upon the import, not of a word, but of a letter. The lesson has been a painful, but I trust a salutary one. It teaches us that our only happiness lies in that implicit confidence which can enable us to trust each other wholly and truly, under any and all circumstances in defiance of tattlers and appearances. It admon-

ishes us, in future, to be less hasty, for could you have known all, Myra, you would have been less unkind."

Such was the explanation, terse and perspicuous, when, in answer to his questions, she had, with characteristic truthfulness, detailed every stage of doubt, hope, fear and heartache—beginning with the military ball and ending with the moment that he had discovered her in her *al fresco* retreat.

The human heart is of that exquisite fibre, by nature wrought of delicacy and truth. Until hardened by vice, it is pure and guileless. So it is that an idle word or an angry look so often rends the tender chords, which, though patched and mended, never quite regain their original tone. The wound may be cicatrized, but the scar remains.

"Have I not suffered too?" she asked when he had finished. "Let this atone for my error."

"Upon one condition—that you will never doubt me again."

Myra looked thoughtful. "Elmer," she said (her voice was low and earnest), "when I see with my own eyes, and hear from your own lips that you love another, then, and then only, will my trust be shaken. I solemnly declare it." She spoke slowly, proudly, as though she felt assured that the possibility to which she alluded was in reality an impossibility, little dreaming of the dumb anguish with which she was one day doomed to recall her words.

His reply was not less confident: "I ask no more. When you hear from my own lips that I love another, send me from you banish me forever; I will cease to torment you."

Thrice happy they, who, restored to mutual confidence, can better appreciate their present gladness for the ordeal through which they have so lately passed.

As weeks went by, it appeared that McLyons was not the only stranger who found some mysterious attraction about B——. There was another who seemed likely to spend the summer with the jovial host of a rival inn, whose after-dinner conversation was a somewhat exaggerated catalogue of his accommodations for invalids, chalybeate waters, etc., etc. "A healthy locality, sir, remarkably healthy, *distressingly* healthy, so the doctors say," which emphatic finale was invariably followed by cachinnations evincive of extreme amusement, in which the speaker was usually the sole participant.

His guest conceded all that he claimed, for it: "B—— was, indeed, a most pleasant resort."

"Mr. Fairfield was a poet and an artist, and as a natural consequence, eccentric." Such was the verdict of the village denizens before he had been long in their midst. "It was not surprising that he delighted in strolling about the woods, sketching, angling, keeping irregular hours, and in fact, being altogether different from ordinary individuals."

Ah! my astute worthies, how your sagacity would have fallen in your own esteem could you have accompanied the dilettante in his forest rambles! Angling in a drawing-room! sketching from a painted landscape! ravished by the warblings of a native singing bird! And Cupid, in his rosy fetters, hid a pair of laughing eyes beneath the veil of mystery which he drew more closely around him.

That he eschewed society was evident, for which singularity he declined giving a reason. This much-disputed question was finally established when numerous invitations were met by the same polite "regret;" after which, the emulous fair gave him up as a sickly dreamer, unworthy a passing thought, since he admired nature more than their own transcendent beauty, though "handsome, romantic and interesting" they all universally agreed. One circumstance baffled them—his visits to Violet Bank. The Marstons were former acquaintances, true; but he was not a society man, that was proved. Perhaps it was not his health alone that detained him; perhaps it was only an excuse. Was he enamored of the daughter? (Many of their meetings, as we are aware, were unknown to them; but two such important personages could scarcely hope to be lost sight of, and they had been seen occasionally together, driving or walking.) Jealousy hooted: "No." Reason whispered: "Yes." "Perhaps his calls were of a business nature," suggested Envy; "Mr. Marston was engaged in so many enterprises, and had agents in so many places." The unfashionable hours at which he sought his residence seemed to give color to the latter hypothesis, which, being the more pleasing of the two, was generally accepted. As the leading topic on the list of *oui dire*, it was discussed *con amore* by Mrs. Fudge and her satellites, who, when they separated, were no wiser than before. And so the gossips speculated and opined, blissfully uncon-

scious of the little drama which was being enacted under their very noses.

The actors kept their own counsel, enjoying to the full the mystification they effected; and Madam Rumor, having her attention drawn to objects of more recent interest, forgot, for a brief while, the trusting pair, to whom the season was one of incomparable felicity, finding, in their reconciliation, a more quiet happiness than the uncertain transport of budding love. Their hearts expanded like the blossoms about their pathway, swelled no less by the breath of heaven than the azure concave that smiled above them. A portion of each day was devoted exclusively to each other's society; sometimes a morning in the drawing-room, but more frequently a twilight promenade or row upon the little river, where together they might watch the sunset glories, as expiring day reclined majestic and serene upon his flaming pyre, and his spirit lingered long in the Western horizon, as though loth to quit a sky so bright. For the recovery of the invalid you had only to note the olive tinge, which was fast returning to the emaciated cheek, as he rested lazily upon his oars, giving ever and anon an enthusiastic outburst at the Iris-tinted beauties which Flora had strewn with lavish hand along the brink. Fond, imaginative youth! their spirits lifted above our little sphere by the spell of Nature's poesy, while the soul-ennobling hours, too delectable to last, stole noiselessly by on fancy's airy pinions.

Elmer's just indignation came near getting the better of his discretion, when he found his suspicions verified in regard to his unprincipled maligner's underhanded misrepresentations. He declared his determination of calling him to account for his dishonorable conduct, and it was only by dint of long and earnest persuasion that Myra succeeded in changing his rash intentions. "It could do no good;" she said, "besides subjecting her to unpleasant remarks; to the engenderer of the mischief, it would be just the triumph he had studied and plotted for. It would mortify him much more to believe that all efforts had proved unsuccessful, and that their peace had never been disturbed for a moment by the shadow of a doubt. Seek a nobler revenge: let him alone. He was beneath his notice. Treat him with the contempt he deserved. He could never come between them again. Let him enjoy the know-

ledge of his foiled stratagems, resting assured that he would be, in due time, rewarded. Since Providence had given them so bright a present, it would be ungrateful to mar it, by word or deed; and another point for consideration—the step he contemplated would be an admission to the world of their attachment, which, for her sake, he would not divulge."

McLyons, meanwhile, undaunted and courteous ever, was a frequent visitor, calling usually in company with friends of the family, to insure a more cordial reception; upon which occasions, should any chance allusion be made to Fairfield, no hint betrayed cognizance of their intimacy.

Elmer inveighed against this social recognition of a man whom she herself declared was beneath the notice of a gentleman.

"There! how quarrelsome he was! What could she do? If he could not, or *would* not see that she loathed him, she would not stoop to the alternative of actual rudeness. Only think of the consequences. Whatever might be the estimation in which he was held by them, facts were, nevertheless, the same. He was a lion in society, and a direct and open slight, prompted by private prejudice, would have little weight with a world that honored and courted him. His influence was much greater than theirs, nor was he unmindful of his advantage. If he was unprincipled, so much greater the reason for not exciting his ill-will, since he had it in his power to retaliate, and would never rest until he had wrought some secret injury upon one or both. No, there was no remedy; there was but one course—silence and indifference."

Myra conquered, as she always did, and the sycophant's name was dropped for more pleasant themes. Elmer had never met him at Violet Bank, the lover preferring odd hours, when he might enjoy the quiet companionship of his betrothed. And so their lives flowed on like a limpid stream, reflecting the flashes of sunlight that played upon its surface, while the current ran soft and smooth below.

July was drawing to a close when the only obstacle in the way of our heroine's supreme happiness was removed by a voluminous epistle from Oscar, which he playfully headed: "'Paradise Regained.'"

"He was at home, as she would see from the caption, and wrote to inform her of an important event which would take place at an

early day. He had urged a speedy marriage, and Henrietta had been at last vanquished. It would be an unostentatious affair, the guests including only their nearest friends. Henrietta did not think that the ceremony could be performed unless she was there, and also insisted that Mr. Harrison should accompany her, or any other friend whom she thought proper to honor as escort.

"And now, my dearest friend and intercessor," ran the closing paragraph, "what can I say, but to pray that the blessing of the peace-maker may be yours! to beg that you will accept a brother's warmest love and esteem, and should it ever be my privilege to serve you, you will remember—

"Yours ever, OSCAR."

The cards, received a week later, were followed by a disconnected, blotted scrawl, which needed not the simple signature, "H. B." to identify the excited scribe.

Lionel was consulted; he had been very chary of his company of late, pleading, for his remissness, a press of business. "It would afford him ineffable pleasure, but it would be impossible for him to attend, having on hand a troublesome suit which required his undivided attentian." His claims were generously transferred to Elmer, which arrangement created quite a stir among the quidnuncs, who had, by this time, gotten an inkling of the true state of affairs, and were wondering mentally at their own stupidity.

The bridal eve proved propitious, and the occasion highly enjoyable to all parties, excepting one, who concealed a stifled execration in the wreathing smile with which she accompanied her graceful congratulations to the happy pair.

Upon the reception of Oscar's letter, Myra had written to Florence to meet her at Fenland Hall, and return with her home. She was, accordingly, on hand, and expressed herself charmed with Mr. Fairfield, with whom, she laughingly declared, she had lost her heart already.

Jerome, who assisted the officiating minister, having been ordained some months previous, was also in attendance. He seized the earliest opportunity for renewing their acquaintance, and the real pleasure he felt at meeting her needed no other avowal than the warmth of his greeting. He said as much in words, however, and as he uttered these trite conventionalities, it was with a strange

fluttering at his heart, which brought home to him the startling conviction, that the admiration which had been aroused within him twelve months before, had drifted into a sentiment deeper and more lasting; and Myra, from some cause, felt ill at ease.

When the festivities were over, and the three friends had retired to their old room to enjoy a cozy chat preparatory to the final leave-taking, she could no longer withhold the precious secret which, until now, she had so selfishly kept from them. Henrietta's arm encircled the waist of the embarrassed speaker. Her only reply had been to draw her closer, and subject the hand she held to a warmer pressure; while, 'mid a burst of rapture from the sylph-like Florence, the exultant gleam which illumined the cerulean eyes might have betrayed, to a less credulous pair, the thought which inspired it.

CHAPTER XIX.

"SERPENTS COIL IN ROSE-THICKETS."

MYRA was much gratified to find her friend and lover on terms of easy friendliness before they had arrived at the end of their journey. She had feared lest these two might not be mutually pleased; the latter would, doubtless, deem Florence frivolous and superficial; while she, on the other hand, could never appreciate the true depth and beauty of Elmer's character. To provide against such a possibility, she had tried hard to impress each with a favorable opinion of the other in anticipation of the meeting, and felt an inward satisfaction in witnessing the result.

Myra's penetration was not wholly blinded by affection, and she had discovered since, what she would have been very loth to admit when at school, that Florence, like the rest of frail mortals, possessed many and glaring faults. Of these, an over-weening love of admiration was not the least noticeable, nor did she always maintain that evenness of temper and dutiful respect becoming in a sister and daughter. But then, she argued, many excuses should be made for her. The straitened circumstances of the father was ever a jarring chord to domestic harmony, and she

would have been an anomaly certainly, had she not been spoiled by the plaudits of *le beau monde*, of which she was a pampered fondling. If she had objectionable qualities, they were counterbalanced by much to admire and love. She was, by nature, warm-hearted and generous. At least, she, of all others, had no right to complain, since no impatient nor unkind word had she ever uttered to her. Hence, she could disapprove, yet still look charitably upon the failings of one whose attachment for herself was disinterested, tried and true. She had, more than once, presumed upon their intimacy to the extent of rating her upon her foibles, upon occasion of which, tears invariably dimmed the eyes of the fair penitent, and, with the dimpled arms around her neck and the lovely head with its crown of burnished gold, like matted sunbeams, resting confidingly upon her shoulder, it was easy to forget or forgive, remembering that, after all, she was but woman, whose very weakness enhanced her charms, and was truthful in her reassurance, that she loved her not less devotedly than in the old days of their girlish friendship.

Florence was not many days at Violet Bank without drawing around her an appreciative cortege. Those who had met her during her former visit hailed her re-appearance among them with unfeigned delight, and at once concerted a plan by which to lengthen the period of her stay—that of making their immediate vicinity so attractive that she would be in no hurry to depart. Of these gallant conspirators, some there were who were actuated solely by State or county pride, others who liked gayety for its own sake, and others still, whose motives were unknown. The neighborhood had undergone few changes in the interval, and her train of admirers comprised, for the most part, those whom she had left, after her week's sojourn, with hearts in a chaos of uncertainty and minds half made up (excepting Mr. Henry, who—poor youth! was still smarting under the pangs of unrequited love), and who were, in consequence, more easily enslaved; while new-comers, and those who had not been so fortunate as to form her acquaintance at the time alluded to, were alike eager to behold the notable beauty, and test the witchery that had triumphed over the aversion of the most avowed misogynists.

McLyons was among the first who entered the suite. They were not exactly strangers,—they had met in Lexington the pre-

vious year; and between these two kindred spirits there soon sprung up a confidential intimacy, which, in outward appearances, verged hard upon a flirtation. They had discussed the tender regards of Myra and Fairfield with that sportive coolness of some so-called "friends" we wot of, and at the end of a fortnight, their combined ingenuity had fixed upon an arch little covin through which to make the lovers jealous—just for *fun*, of course. McLyons proposed what he innocently termed, "a harmless prank," and his willing confederate readily agreed, declaring that "it would be too funny for anything!"

Elmer's pleasant visits, with their halcyon hours of quiet happiness, were necessarily at an end, now that the house was crowded with other guests. He had murmured in mock displeasure at this invasion upon his lawful rights and privileges, and wished the intruders anywhere but at Violet Bank. There was very little comfort, he told Myra, in sitting indifferently by and seeing the woman he loved monopolized by others. Not that he would deprive her of a moment's enjoyment, but it was martyrdom to him —so much so, that he preferred suspending his visits until these troublesome personages were well out of the way, since he would enjoy her society exclusively or not at all.

In reply to this she had said: "Don't be unreasonable, Elmer. I am sorry too, but I am afraid that we are growing very selfish. We should be willing to make some sacrifices for the gratification of others, and you would not have me violate the laws of hospitality, nor subject myself to raillery by a show of partiality." Encountering his admiring gaze, she added teasingly: "I fear you are becoming spoiled by too much indulgence. I have always heard that kind treatment was sadly detrimental to the growth of the tender passion. I shall be compelled to change my tactics, be more exacting and capricious, play at coquetry, and keep you in an agony of doubt until you are brought to a sense of your own unworthiness, and learn to accept your honors with becoming humility."

Words have little weight when looks and acts refute them, as was proved, in the present instance, by the equanimity he maintained throughout the interview, despite her roguish persiflage.

It was all very well to talk about suspending his visits, and en-

joying her society exclusively or not at all; but ere a week of self-exile had elapsed, Elmer realized that, when he saw her not,

"Chaos was come again,"

and concluded that it was better to see her in a crowd than not to see her at all.

Things went on smoothly enough for awhile, during which Myra's duties as hostess left her little time to bestow upon any special favorite; hence, no shade of uneasiness disturbed her peace of mind when he was more with Florence than herself. It was very good of Elmer, she argued, to be so considerate of her feelings, and spare her the annoyance which any marked attention might occasion her. And with this reflection, she was content to surrender him, for the time being, to her fair friend. *Credula res amor est!*

She was not suffered long to enjoy her present tranquillity, however, and as day after day went by, and fate seemed against their ever having a private word together, she became restless and dissatisfied. Did chance leave them alone, did they seek a promenade upon the terrace or a *tete-a-tete* in the library, she was invariably called off, and her presence demanded elsewhere. And then, there was another source of excessive vexation! when he and McLyons met at the house (which was not unfrequently), by some strange fatality, she was always thrown with the latter, while the former, to avoid coming in contact with a man he could not tolerate, as regularly joined the group that contested for the smiles of the Kentucky beauty.

Myra was seriously annoyed; what to think or how to act, she knew not. His manner toward her was evidently changed, his bearing haughty and his words equivocal. She was conscious of a dull aching at her heart such as she had never before experienced, and felt her cheeks turn crimson, as with guilt of shame, when she caught his questioning eyes riveted upon her.

To a less high-minded, sensitive pair, it would have been apparent that some preconcerted conspiracy were upon the tapis; for notwithstanding their affected *insouciance*, the tacit understanding existing between these gay intriguers would have been manifest to those versed in the mysteries of *ars est celare artem*. But it is hard for those who are truthful and upright to detect

perfidy in others, and the wary allies, noting the success of their finesse, redoubled their energies.

"Florence," said Myra to her friend one night when they had gone to their room, "is Mr. McLyons a friend of yours?"

Florence looked up. "A friend? Well! I don't know; not a *particular* friend," shaking out the golden braids which she was leisurely uncoiling; "Why the query?"

"Because," replied the other, with a troubled face, "I would not wound you for the world, by saying anything detractive of any one whom you looked upon as a friend, but I wish he wouldn't visit here."

"Wouldn't visit here?" arching her brows in affected surprise; "may I ask why?"

"Because I do not like him," curtly.

"Why?" persisted the beauty provokingly.

"Oh! for several reasons," with rising color.

The comb fell from her hand; Florence dropped upon a chair, and a merry girlish laugh rung through the dormitory.

Myra stared at her wonderingly.

"Nothing," she replied, still laughing, in answer to the look of inquiry, "I was just thinking what an odd little creature you are. What would you wager that I could not guess the spring of your dislike?"

Myra busied herself about the bureau, to cover her confusion.

"Ah! that tell-tale blush!" cried her amused companion, peering mischievously into her eyes. "Are you quite sure that a certain dark-haired gentleman is in no way connected with this singular prejudice?

"There! don't be offended. I was only jesting," she said apologetically, as Myra, with a pained look, turned impatiently from her, "I told you a fib just now. Mr. McLyons *is* a particular friend of mine. I like him ever so much—better than any one I know, in fact (your own dear self always excepted), and have almost promised—well! no matter what;" she added coquettishly.

The searching eyes were again upon her. She winced beneath their regards, and went on in a changed tone: "You do him injustice, Myra. I am not ignorant as to the cause of your antipathy, neither is he. I have heard him speak of it often, always

with sincere regret for the unfortunate blunder for which you will never forgive him. He had heard it rumored, he said, that Mr. Fairfield was soon to be married to a young lady in Havana, and not dreaming then of the tie which he has since had reason to suspect existed between you at the time, and knowing him to be an acquaintance, merely mentioned the fact, thinking it a subject of mutual interest. He learned afterwards that the mistake arose simply from a typographical error, and has longed to explain, but you were so—to use his own expression—'so unapproachable.'

"He was for some time engaged to Mr. Fairfield's sister, so he told me, to whom he was warmly attached; but the brother, wishing her to wed some one else, never liked him, and finally influenced his sister to banish him altogether. He had never wronged the former in word or thought, and his one unpardonable offense had been, simply, that he loved his sister,—a grave charge to bring against a gentleman. The circumstances being such, renders his position doubly embarrassing, feeling as he does, that his lightest words are misconstrued and his best motives attributed to unmanly spite—not a pleasant reflection for a man of honor. He admires your unwavering fidelity and respects the high-toned principles which prompt your coolness toward himself, and in his anxiety to set himself right in your opinion and remove the unfavorable impression made upon your mind by the incident alluded to, he would have even dared to brave your open displeasure, had not delicacy forbade anything like a manifestation of curiosity in an *affaire du cœur* of a comparative stranger; for although he has made it his study to atone for his unintentional and awkward misrepresentation, your manner is so repellent, so distantly polite, that he has never been able to advance an inch upon your first acquaintance."

Myra was silenced, but by no means convinced. The defense was plausible, though she knew it to be untrue, and she would have been at a loss for argument, had not the sudden revelation, that he was her friend's favored suitor, restrained her. She felt sincere pity for this vain, weak girl, whom, being judged by her criterion, she believed as artless and credulous as herself. How natural that she should believe his statement, and how clever was the deception! Her estimate of his character was unchanged, and her upright nature forbade an expression of approval she did not

feel. Since, therefore, she could say nothing encouraging, she deemed it best to say nothing at all.

The accomplished *soubrette* saw her advantage, and profited by it. "I interpret your silence, she said sorrowfully, "you do not approve of my choice. I cannot blame you. It is natural and proper that you should be guided in all things by the man you love; but loyalty and justice are not incompatible. I am deeply grieved, dear Myra, that you cannot esteem one in whom I have reposed my heart's most sacred trust. I will not chide you," and the blue eyes glistened between humid lashes, "but can only hope that some day you may know him better. At any rate, that you will bear with him—for my sake."

Picnics and lawn parties superseded soirees and private theatricals. These Fairfield never attended, and Myra felt, day after day, that they were drifting apart and an ocean of reserve was gradually gathering between them. How nauseating had become the artificial life she was leading, which the world, with its hollow smile, terms "pleasure!" How she pined for the true and real; wished that there was no such thing as society and appearances; that Florence (pardon her, reader,) had never come, or that she might be left awhile to peace and quiet! some time to think! one short hour in which to ask why he had grown so cold and strange!

Thrice she resolved upon a solution of the mystery, and to insist upon a written, since she was denied a verbal explanation. As often did pride revolt, leaving her half angry with herself and impatient with all things else. She tried to look and act as though nothing troubled her, to appear as careless and indifferent as the most blithesome of those with whom she mingled;

> "But sorrow, that is couched in seeming gladness,
> Is like that mirth, fate turns to sudden sadness."

The "mystery" was, to the initiated, no mystery at all. It was a part of the compact that they should see as little of each other as possible, in accordance with which, Florence, with exquisite tact, contrived always to draw Elmer to her side, leaving her accomplice a clear field; while he, on the other hand, knowing the arrangement to be anything but agreeable to the lover, was most assiduous in his attentions. The former, being an inmate of the

house and confidante of one, if not both, possessed more varied means of achieving the desired end than her less favored suitor. Vigilant ever, not an unshed tear or a sigh escaped her; and so well did this feminine Iago act the part assigned her, that at the end of a month, Fairfield was a prey to doubts which he dare not own. To allay the uneasiness of which he was the tortured victim, he determined to see her at once and alone. He called twice, with the same unsatisfactory result: she was out. Then came a note, requesting an interview. With reviving hope, Myra was sealing a reply in the affirmative, when her friend reminded her of an engagement which they could not break, and which, in the agitation of the moment, had escaped her memory. This settled the question. There was a limit to everything: he *would* see her, and that before another dawn. He *would* know the meaning of this singular contrariety of word and action. His intentions, however, were changed suddenly, when, upon being shown into the drawing-room unannounced a few hours later, the scene which greeted him was Myra at the piano, his supposed rival turning her music with an air of easy assurance. His eyes met hers. He looked but once; but oh! what sorrowful entreaty and reproach were in that glance! He bowed stiffly, looked about him, and sought Florence, who watched the proceedings from a bay window opposite.

Myra was in a maze. She longed to rush from the apartment. Her words were uttered mechanically; her thoughts were with the couple across the room.

"You will ride this afternoon;" she said to Florence, after the siesta the following day, "whom will you honor by accompanying?"

"Guess;" with a quizzical expresssion.

"That would be a difficult matter, when one has as many admirers as Miss Stillbury," she responded, with the ghost of a smile.

"Mr. Fairfield," eying her keenly.

"Don't be jealous, dear," said the coquette patronizingly, as Myra reddened foolishly; "men are the *silliest* creatures!"

Fairfield was waiting below, and Florence, equipped for a drive, was descending the stairs, when she was met by a servant, bearing a handsome bouquet for Miss Stillbury, with Mr. McLyon's compliments. "Oh! bother the men!" she exclaimed petulantly, re-

tracing her steps to pen a note of thanks. "Here, Myra, I am in a hurry; the horses are restless and Mr. Fairfield impatient. Direct this, please," tossing her an envelope.

Myra was hardly a rational being, just then. She picked it up absently, and obeyed in silence.

Fairfield said nothing, but his brow was as black as midnight and his lips compressed more closely, as he recognized the familiar calligraphy on the envelope handed the bearer.

Myra stood gazing after them from the window until their figures were lost in a cloud of dust; then throwing herself upon the bed, sobbed bitterly.

They had gone perhaps a mile before either spoke, Elmer unwilling and his companion fearing to break the silence.

"Miss Florence!" he said, at length, abruptly confronting her, "we have never treated each other as strangers. I was prepared to like before I knew you, and since our first meeting, have considered you a friend. You have a woman's penetration and sympathetic nature. That I am unhappy, you have discovered long since; that, so far as in your power lies, you would gladly alleviate my sufferings, I am convinced from past kindnesses. Will you increase my obligations by answering, to the best of your knowledge, a few questions upon a subject that concerns me deeply?"

"With pleasure, Mr. Fairfield, provided they involve no betrayal of confidence."

"Thank you," gloomily; "you are a confidante of Miss Marston's?"

"Yes."

"And have been—"

"Since we were at school together."

"You know her disposition?"

"Better than my own."

"Has she faults?"

"Yes; all of us have."

"You love her?"

"Devotedly."

"A woman's love!" he exclaimed, contemptuously, "what is it?"

"More lasting than a man's," she protested, with calm earnestness.

"You believe it?" questioned he, skeptically.

"I know it!"

"You are an advocate of your sex. Perhaps you would deem it disloyal to admit their inconstancy, insincerity, vanity, or rather—weakness."

"An advocate of my sex, certainly—I despise the woman who is not—but only so far as I conscientiously believe, as they honestly deserve. I claim justice, nothing more."

"And you conscientiously believe what you have just asserted?"

"I do."

"Then you are less observant, less discerning, than I fancied you. Twelve months ago I believed as you do. Experience is a stern, hard, unsparing, but infallible teacher. I am wiser now."

(Silence, during which his companion turned upon him a face all sympathy, all tenderness.)

"You love her," he went on, in the same melancholy strain; and then, to himself: "so do I."

No answer.

He sighed heavily: "Blind, fond, besotted fool that I was, to have ever imagined that she cared for me!" he mused.

"She *did* love you," broke in the reassuring tones; "she *did* love you, and loves you *now!*"

The lover shook his head sorrowfully: "You are mistaken. Love has some consideration for its object."

"She *does* love you," with greater emphasis than before.

"How then do you explain her demeanor toward the man I despise?"

"Nothing easier. She does it to prove you."

"To prove me!" with ire.

"Yes. She cares nothing for Mr. McLyons. Her dislike is only second to your own."

"And yet, she receives his attentions, accepts his flowers and writes him polite billets."

"Etiquette requires it."

"Etiquette!" with curling lip, "the laws of etiquette do not demand a violation of truth and principle."

"You are making yourself unhappy about nothing, Mr. Fairfield," said she, with mild severity, "by raising from a spectre a host of goblins. Your fears are groundless, believe me. She is only trifling with him,—she told me as much, not a week since."

"Trifling!" he repeated, indignantly, "trifling!" while an angry light flashed from the dark eyes; "if I believed that she could so demean herself—"

"You are hasty, uncharitable;" with quiet composure. "The practice you condemn is a failing characteristic of our sex. Admiration is a woman's right, and fascination her only weapon. It is no small triumph for a novice to hook the gold-fish which beauties and heiresses have angled for in vain."

He bit his lips in suppressed passion, but his voice was low and respectful. "Miss Florence," he said huskily, "you have done what you could. I thank you. You have tried to reassure, tried to encourage, tried to cheer me. I appreciate the endeavor, not less that you have failed, failed utterly—worse than failed! The will is good, but you little know your art. Your sympathy is sweet, but your balm is wormwood. The words meant to console are like a two-edged sword, riving a heart already torn, shattering a faith already shaken. You cannot, oh you cannot know how I loved her! passionately! blindly! You say that she has faults. I could discover none. I believed her all that was pure, true, high-minded and noble—a perfect woman! bowed heart and soul before her altar, and loved with all the depth and fervor of my nature. My love can recognize no medium. If I have been deceived, have staked all and lost, rather would I believe her falser than falsehood, more deceitful than hypocrisy, so that I might fly from—but forget her—never! than the vain, fickle toy of art and flattery which you portray."

"I am sorry, *very* sorry," and her voice trembled, "that my panacea has proved so inefficacious—sorry that I irritated, when I meant to soothe. You are not like yourself, I think. You scarcely know what you are saying. It grieves me to hear you talk so. You are excited, now; harsh and unjust. You will be calmer, more reasonable, ere long, and see things in a different light. I admit that you have had much to vex you; but if you are seeking *perfection*, you are in search of an ideal you are destined never to find. I *am* ignorant, I know, deplorably ignorant; but I know *some* things, if I am not so clever as one of my friends," with a shy glance at the pale, stern face just above her own. "I know *girls*, and Myra in particular. She is all that you believed her, 'pure, true, high-minded and noble,' but not wholly exempt from

the frailties which human nature is heir to. I would expostulate with her—tax her with unkindness, with want of generosity, did I not know the consequences. She would brook no strictures upon her conduct; no strictures from *me*. She would consider the affair no business of mine; would think me officious, meddlesome. It would nettle her, make her more tantalizing and perverse. Your fate lies in your own hands. It is for you to decide whether you will win or lose."

He looked at her enquiringly. She answered with a smile that —to *him*—would have been encouraging, had he not been in anything but a hopeful mood, just then. It played a moment upon her lips, and her voice was peculiarly persuasive: "I have failed as conciliator; try me as counselor."

He inclined his head, as in expectancy, and without awaiting permission, she pursued: "Woman's heart is a singular compound: a little cold, a little warm; a little hard, a little tender; a little imperious, a little submissive; a little stubborn, a little yielding; an artistic blending of faults and virtues. Fitful as an April day!—won more often by neglect—pique, if you will—than by long, untiring, obsequious devotion. Perhaps you have been too self-surrendering, too much a puppet to her whims. You must be more independent—indifferent, if need be. Discontinue your visits for awhile. Let her feel your absence, your waning affection. She will recall you, never fear."

"I cannot," said he, sadly.

"Cannot?" mimicked she, in an altered tone; "very well! Then you reject my sympathy and scorn my advice. Some day you may see your error. I am sorry, Mr. Fairfield, that I am so incompetent to serve you."

"You misunderstand me," he said apologetically. "I appreciate and thank you for both—you do not need that I should repeat this—but I cannot stoop to dissimulation. I could brave anything, suffer anything; but soil my honor? no! not even for *her!*"

"There is nothing to soil your honor in just resentment. There is nothing a woman admires so much as independence. You said, just now, 'that I little knew my art.' You understand yours less. Your theory is good, but your tactics decidedly injudicious. Desperate ends must be brought about by desperate means, and they do not love truly who are not willing

to sacrifice all else for the one grand issue upon which hangs a life of joy or wretchedness. They who let scruples outweigh their love do not deserve to be blest."

"Then you would have me seem other than I am. In other words, I must act the hypocrite."

"Not the hypocrite, but the honorable gentleman, who knows his rights and dares maintain them."

Evening closed in, and still the drive and *tete-a-tete* were prolonged, Fairfield, growing more facile under the half persuasive, half derisive logic of his fair monitor. Heaven's myriad lamps were lit when they returned. There were visitors below, but Myra had not gone down. She was looking from the window; watched them climb the terrace and enter the portico. There they stood for some time, conversing *sotto voce*.

"And if she shows contrition," he whispered, replacing his hat, "if you think she really cares—if there is any hope for me—you will let me know."

"Yes, I will; trust all to me."

He took the white hand and carried it to his lips. "You are a good friend," he said, feelingly; "very kind, very patient with me. Better, far better, than I deserve."

Myra could not catch the words. She only heard subdued voices. A strange feeling crept o'er her, like a premonition of ill, as she saw Elmer descend and disappear in the shadows.

CHAPTER XX.

EAVESDROPPING, AND WHAT CAME OF IT.

IT was late in September, and Florence was to leave them on the morrow. Myra looked up nervously at every ring of the door-bell, and started involuntarily as Fairfield entered the parlors, for the first time since the drive and conversation above detailed. The room was full. This was no time for questions and explanations; so, with a mighty effort, she checked the rising impulse, and tried to forget that there were other gentlemen in the world than the one she was entertaining.

There was enough wit and beauty present to engage the attention of the attendant beaux—she would hardly be missed could she make her exit unobserved. Watching her opportunity, therefore, she slipped out to compose herself and gain strength for the trying ordeal, unconscious of the dark pleading eyes that followed her retiring figure.

Gaining her chamber, she threw open the casement and let the breezes sport among the waves of chestnut hair and fan her throbbing temples. Leaning her head against the frame-work, she looked out upon the peaceful welkin, whose soft light beamed pensively upon her, as though to quell the tumultuous emotions that stirred her bosom. A flood of memories swept over her. Sweet, regretful memories! lost in the dawning hope, whose flickering ray illumined her woman's soul. A pearly tear stole down her cheek. She brushed it away gently, and pressed her hand upon her heart to still its beating.

It was not anger, it was not resentment, that dimmed the wonted lustre of her eye, but hope's uncertain gleam, penetrating the darksome vapors that hovered about her future; for the human heart is like a delicate evergreen, which, though wrapped for a time in an icy mantle, beneath which all is dark, and damp and cold, and though dwarfed and odorless under the despotic reign of the winter-king, is fresh and living still. And ah! who dreams of the wealth of beauty concealed in the unsightly snow-bank, until thawing suns and vernal showers reveal its hidden treasure! Capricious youth! Despondent without reason, sanguine without cause! How prone to mould futurity after the fashion of its own will! its transient joys and wasting sorrows fluttered with a breath!

It might have been an hour, it might have been more. She had no conception of the flight of time. A sound upon the portico recalled her to herself. Mindful of the conjectures which her absence might occasion, she adjusted her toilet and descended the stairway with a lighter step, as confident in the whispered assurance of her own heart that "all would be well," as though she saw her lover, penitent and pleading, at her feet.

She was crossing the hall when voices upon the porch arrested her attention. The door was slightly ajar, and she paused as she spied through the aperture a white dress, whose wearer she knew

to be Florence, and another form, a form she thought she recognized.

"Is this all you have to tell me?" said the full, manly tones she knew so well; "Is this the happiness you promised should be mine? Is *all* lost? Have I nothing to live for—nothing to hope for? Will you leave me without a word of encouragement or consolation?"

The beauty sighed, but did not speak.

"You cannot understand a love like mine," and the deep voice faltered. "Could you conceive of my sufferings, you would pity the wretch whose passion is as intense and deathless as 'tis misplaced and hopeless."

Myra seemed petrified. She had heard nothing of their previous conversation, and could not know that it was she of whom he spoke. She only heard the low, passionate words which she had foolishly believed were for her alone; saw herself duped, betrayed! She would have cried out in her sudden anguish and fled from a scene that froze her blood; but the stunning blow had deprived her of volition, and with blanching face and colorless lips she stood transfixed. A deadly pang pierced her heart, scattering the bleeding fragments, and leaving in its stead a nameless void! an indescribable hiatus!

Her sensations might be compared to those of a fallen angel, who, banished from the sublimer element, in mid-air suspended, descries through the lucent ether the beauties of his celestial home. Forgetful of his fallen estate, he plumes his wings, and soars, soars, soars, until alighting at the shining portal, he finds it closed, and closed to him forever! His pinions are fettered, and he is hurled into fathomless depths of blackest night!

The breeze stifled, and the gay laugh and jocund voices of her merry guests smote on her ear like the gibes of the lost.

The white dress rustled, and as Florence's eyes encountered hers, she hurried on to the drawing-room with a sense of guilt and shame strong upon her, at being detected in the first dishonorable act of her life—eavesdropping.

She talked, she played, she sang,—sang as she had never sung before! like that eastern bird, which warbles its own requiem, and expires!

The couple returned from the porch; Florence joined the group by the piano, but Elmer sat apart, gloomy and preoccupied.

There was a wild, a touching pathos in every strain, growing more wondrous sweet as it rose and fell on the tide of song. There was a knell in every chord, a wail of despair in every trill, that found its way to every heart save his who inspired it.

Elmer heard all, but felt nothing. He only saw that she was affable and engaging as usual, proud of her triumph, conscious of her power, and gloried in his wretchedness.

What a fearful thing is jealousy! A lying, mocking imp! misery's own cup-bearer! and he who drinks of his cordial, barters his little foretaste of heaven, while yet on earth, for the infernal draught.

Myra forbore that night any allusion to the subject uppermost in her thoughts. A suspicion of her friend's treachery was beginning to dawn upon her, blinded as she was by affection and duplicity, and with it a hundred trivial circumstances, which, though unremarked at the time, when taken in connection with the disclosures of the evening, were full of significance. Still she would give her an opportunity to exculpate herself, if, upon any plea, she *could* vindicate her conduct.

Florence was more thoughtful, considerate and tender, despite the haughty coldness with which her victim submitted to, without returning her caresses. Her actions were such as to assure the afflicted one of her sincere and heart-felt commiseration, without obtruding upon the grief which she well knew was tearing the tenuous fibrils of that proud, sensitive heart. Any mention of Fairfield was mutually avoided therefore, and Myra retired to her couch, but not to rest, while the racking thoughts, the bitter recollections that surged through her tortured brain, merged into one—*she had been betrayed!*

Sleep came not with its magic balm and peaceful oblivion, as the tedious hours wore on. Only one consolation the morn could bring. It would at least rid her of that fair, false face, which had now become more loathsome to her than that of her fawning confederate. "What shall I do?" she cried inly, as she revolved her course.

Had Lionel been consulted, the fatal misunderstanding might never have occurred. But she could not go to this noble friend

and faithful mentor with the story of her wrongs. For why?—had he not hinted that Florence might not be all that she seemed? And had she not laughed at his sage suggestion, his superior discernment, paying no heed to his gentle caution? She could not bring herself to say to him, for whose deep, unselfish devotion she had given only a sisterly regard, that lover and friend, in whose honor and fidelity she had trusted as her own, had proved themselves alike faithless.

"Florence!" she said frigidly, at parting, "I owe you an apology for unintentionally overhearing your conversation with Mr. Fairfield, last evening. It was unpremeditated, believe me, and gladly would I have spared myself this humiliating confession, had not astonishment chained me to the spot."

"Florence looked at her eagerly, beseechingly. "Did you hear *all?*" she asked, with peculiar emphasis.

"I heard enough," was the bitter rejoinder.

The white arms were thrown impulsively around her; the blue eyes dewy with tears. "You are angry with me," came the sorsowful objurgation, "angry with *me*, your best and dearest friend!"

Myra strove to free herself, but she only clasped her the more tightly. "I know what you think," she went on, deprecatingly, "but oh, Myra, how you wrong me! It was for *your* sake and to secure *your* happiness that I suffered it. I saw that you had been deceived, and that he was unworthy of you. I would have warned you before, but feared to wound or displease you. I had resolved to tell you before I left, but you have spared me the pain. You have seen and heard for yourself. Why should I say more?"

Myra stood irresolute, stifling her sobs and struggling with the rebellious tears.

"Don't," cried the friend, in tones of entreaty, feeling the convulsions of the slender figure. "Don't. You must not. It kills me to see you suffer. Don't think of him—he is not worth it. He is a deceitful hypocrite, a fickle, shameless flirt, unworthy the love of any true woman. I knew how it would distress you, shock you, when, in your blind infatuation, you believed him all that a man could be; but I would be no better than he, were I to keep it from you; and rather would I witness this temporary grief, hard

as it is, than see you condemned to life-long misery. Think of his temerity, too! to come to your own house—to your most intimate friend and confidante—with stories of his 'deathless love!' I told him, in plain language, my opinion of his conduct, and that I scorned a love as false as his! But it did no good. He is hardened beyond retrieve. He says he knows now that he never loved you: that the circumstances of your meeting and the subsequent revelations worked upon his romantic fancy, and he believed, at the time, that he really loved you. He has since discovered his mistake, but being a man of honor, will take no steps towards its dissolution, and will fulfil his engagement, if you wish it, but thinks that when you understand the true state of his feelings, you will be generous enough to release him. I knew you well enough to know that you would never give credence to a word against him, until he had proved, conclusively, that he was not what you thought him. This is my reason for allowing the declaration, to a part of which, you were an unintentional and unwilling listener."

"There, now," she said, coaxingly, "don't think any more about it. I wouldn't let him know that I cared a fig for him, and there are a dozen others who would be only too glad to fill his place. Men, as a general rule, are pretty much on a par—as fickle as the wind, and not worth a thought. It grieves me to leave you, when I so long to stay with and comfort you. But you won't distress yourself. Promise me that you won't. I shall write as soon as I reach home. In the meantime, remember that, whate'er betide, you have *one* friend, who, let come what may, will *never* forsake you."

Myra made no reply. The last sentence she scarcely heard. She was absorbed in her own thoughts, reviewing mentally the events of the previous evening. Her lover's unworthiness was no less apparent; but Florence, in her anxiety to "make assurance doubly sure," had outwitted herself. The sigh that had been borne to her from the porch was born neither of scorn nor indignation, and as it fell again upon the intellectual tympanum, it rung through her brain like the hiss of a serpent.

CHAPTER XXI.

IVY COTTAGE.—A DREAM AND ITS SEQUEL.

"MOTHER!"

"Well, daughter!"

"I think I shall spend next week at Ivy Cottage."

"But, my child!"

"But, mother!"

"Florence only left this morning, surely you have not begun to feel lonely already."

"No, ma'am, I am not at all lonely."

"Why, then, this sudden determination?"

"It is not sudden, mother," evasively; "the trip was in contemplation before Florence's departure. Henrietta's letter, received a few hours since, decided me."

"But," objected the mother mildly, "you have not been quite well lately; I am afraid the fatigue would be too much for you. Don't you think you had better stay at home and recruit awhile? You need rest and quiet after your summer's dissipation."

"Not rest—change," with an effort to smile. "I so long to see them in their new home," she went on eagerly; "I have had enough of gayety for the present; as for quiet, I could not expect it here; it is different there; I can think of nothing more gratifying than a peep into such an Eden as Henrietta describes. My exodus will be as precipitate as my advent; that is, I intend to leave before the news is rumored abroad, by which means I hope to enjoy their society in peace."

"But there is no one to accompany you; 'father' is busy, Lionel ——"

"I don't wish to trouble either father or Lionel," she interrupted hastily; "I don't require an escort for a three hours' ride. The fact is, I should prefer going alone; it would be all the nicer."

"But you have not apprised Henrietta of your coming; you will not be expected so soon; there will be no one to meet you."

"Are you sure of it?" playfully; "Ivy Cottage is only a mile

from C——; Oscar is in town every forenoon; I can send him a telegram from B——, to be at the depot on my arrival."

Mrs. Marston eyed her daughter narrowly, with an expression of genuine solicitude. "My child!" she said persuasively, "I am at a loss to account for this singular freak. It would suit better for you to go later; don't you think you could postpone your visit a few weeks?"

Myra met the questioning glance with frank, pleading eyes. "Mother," she said earnestly, "it is not a 'freak,' as you imagine. A few weeks hence I might not care to go. I have a reason; I wish to go *now*."

She had, as we have already seen, a morbid propensity for changing localities whenever she got into any serious trouble. She had an idea that change of scene and surroundings would divert her mind, give temporary relief, and help her to forget. She did not know that her heart was a fane, that one deity excluded all others, and that from thought's mysterious fount—a fount she could not seal—would arise the shades of departed joys, which, like Vestal virgins, would tend the sacred flame, keeping love's fire ever bright: that so long as memory and reason lasted, until she could flee from herself, she could not obliterate the sweet, troubled past; and that go where she might, the piercing cry, the piteous moan, the plaintive prayer: "Teach me, ah! teach me to forget!" would bring back one mocking echo: "*Never*."

Silence followed, during which Mrs. Marston regarded her daughter scrutinizingly.

"I am in earnest; I really wish it," Myra reiterated, guessing the nature of her thoughts.

"As you like, my child," acceded the doting mother, whose tractable will was accustomed to succumb to that of the more resolute daughter. "My objections arose simply from the fear that you might overtask your strength. I have no desire to oppose any reasonable wish that could add to your enjoyment; I have no aim in life but to make you happy."

Myra answered her with a look of mingled love and gratitude, and shortly afterwards quitted the chamber.

Mrs. Marston arose as the door closed after her, and walked to the window. It opened upon the long balcony which Myra paced with bowed head and folded arms, profoundly meditative. She

was turning the corner for the tenth time, when she chanced to look up suddenly, and encountering her mother's eyes through the window-pane, halted abruptly and entered the hall.

Mrs. Marston returned to her seat, and resumed her work with a troubled face. Something of the truth had penetrated her mind. That Myra was not herself, she had noticed for weeks past; but with the undiscerning partiality of a loving parent, had attributed the change to any but the true cause. That any one could become estranged from *her*, the idol of so many hearts, amounted almost to an absurdity in her opinion; and that the fair girl, whose affection for her child was more the devotion of a sister than a friend, could be other than she seemed, was no less preposterous to one as guileless and unsuspecting as herself. Still, as days went by, and Elmer failed to make his appearance, the possibility of a "difference" at last presented itself—"a lover's quarrel," which, like a summer cloud, would soon pass over, leaving no trace of its transient gloom. Such was her interpretation of the "singular freak," and the consciousness of a care she could not lighten the cause of anxiety which showed itself in the still beautiful countenance.

This was Tuesday, and Myra left on the early train the following morning. Her mother accompanied her to the station. All was quiet in the village as they drove through, just as the rising sun was peering through the distant tree-tops.

She drew up at the post-office, and alighted, for the alleged purpose of leaving directions for the forwarding of mail during her absence. Fortune favored her for once, and it was with a feeling of infinite relief that she found—for a wonder—*Mr.* Fudge in attendance, instead or his garrulous consort. He rubbed his eyes sleepily as she entered, swallowed a yawn as he raised his hat (which, by the way, he generally wore throughout the day, regardless of place or posture), listened to her injunctions without change of countenance, took the package she handed him somewhat reluctantly, and without even so much as a glance at the superscription, tossed it over his shoulder, along with the morning's mail.

Ivy Cottage was just what the name would imply, and just such a home as might be expected with Henrietta as presiding genius.

Approaching by a shady detour, you came suddenly upon a wilderness of sweets—shrubs, honeysuckles and flowering plants, growing alike in untrained exuberance, climbing here and trailing there, interlacing their flexile sprays and mingling their versi-colored diadems with the darker foliage, forming a confused mass of floral beauties. In the rear sloped a gentle declivity, clad in living green, where the trellises groaned beneath their load of tangled vines, with their red and purple clusters. On one side lay the garden, on the other the orchard, while in the centre stood the villa itself, tiny, antique and picturesque. It had been the property of a distinguished author, then deceased, who came and went with the roses, living, while here, in strict seclusion. He was a gentleman of taste and culture, and had fitted up this summer lodge in consonance with his own peculiar ideas. The chateau was of brick, low and rambling; the architecture simple and unique, with its dormer-windows, alcoves and daintily-carved balusters. Creeping ivy clung about the gable and hung in long, loose pendants from roof and wall. Within all was in harmony with the scene without, simplicity, taste and neatness so exquisitely blended, that beauty and fragrance greeted the senses on every hand—a Fenland Hall in miniature!

Myra was charmed, Oscar delighted and Henrietta overjoyed. "What do you think of our home?" asked the latter, with her sunny smile, when, later in the day, she had shown her visitor over the premises.

"I think," replied her companion, thoughtfully, "that the cynic who dives deep into the mysteries of metaphysics, theorizes and moralizes, holding himself and his dyspepsia above the creatures of his kind, and scoffs at the stupidity of 'love in a cottage,' need spend but an hour at *Ivy* Cottage to make him ashamed of himself and his snarlings, and bring home to him the startling realization that he is not a man at all, but an intellectual beast—a cross between a bear and a demigod."

And Myra's extravagant commendation was not undeserved. There was between this genial pair no ostentatious display of that self-sacrificing devotion supposed to exist between those who have taken the vows "for better or for worse," which is not only tiresome to all around them, but coarse and disgusting; in a majority of cases, evanescent, too, taking wings with the honey-

moon, and usually succeeded by sentiments quite the reverse. There was in their deportment none of the nonsensical affectation of newly-married people, but a quiet deference for the wishes and opinions of each other, which spoke in every look, word and action. Theirs was no sickly flame to spend itself in flowery speeches and loving glances, but affection of that higher type, founded upon mutual respect, the only sure basis of conjugal felicity. It was a pleasure to be with them, and something of their own light-heartedness was unconsciously transfused into those with whom they were thrown.

Myra's unexpected visit had for the merry hostess no significance beyond a desire to see her and the "Arcadia" of which she had written so much. Oscar was not so easily hoodwinked; he recalled her last evening in Lexington, their conversation, and the impression made upon him at the time. His suspicions were communicated to his youthful helpmeet, who laughed them away with the mental resolve to go to the bottom of the secret, if secret it were. Prefacing her interrogations, therefore, with an arch inquiry after "the chevalier," she was met by a look so cold, so stern, so unlike anything she had ever seen in that countenance before, that, pained and wondering, she changed the subject abruptly, and never ventured to repeat the offense. She had looked forward to having her a long time with them, and had already begun to devise schemes for rendering her stay more pleasurable. She was inconsolable for the former and amazed at the latter, when she was informed of the uncertainty of the one, with the request that the news of her arrival might not be circulated, as she would prefer quiet and their own society above any the vicinity could afford. Henrietta was importunate, seconded by Oscar, and their guest undecided.

It was her second day at the Cottage, when another visitor, equally unexpected, was received with no less cordiality. About ten in the morning the friends were startled by a peal of the door-bell. Myra's pulses quickened as a tall figure was ushered in, and was puzzled to think who it could be, when the servant announced: "A gentleman to see the ladies."

Henrietta rose demurely, and assuming a matronly air, went down to meet the formidable stranger. An exclamation of pleasure burst from her, as she was greeted by a pleasant-faced, amiable

looking gentleman, who clasped her hand and asked after her health with the ease and interest of an old acquaintance. His grave dignity and general appearance (decidedly clerical) leave the reader in no doubt as to his identity.

Myra felt that some unlucky star had guided her to this spot, and secretly annoyed, with whom or what she could hardly tell, as she heard the impulsive: "Oh, Mr. Jerome! I am so glad to see you; but had no idea that you were nearer than a hundred miles."

"Not half so glad as I am," was the quiet response. "The meeting is as unexpected to me as to you; I only left home yesterday."

"And to what happy circumstance am I indebted for this unlooked-for pleasure?"

"Several," with a quizzical smile. "I found it necessary to take a trip which took me through C——. I arrived there about an hour since, missed connection, fell in with Maurice, was inquiring about you, and debating in my own mind the question of calling, when he told me that Miss Marston was with you."

"And that decided you," broke in Henrietta with a gay laugh.

"That decided me," mischievously.

"And so I am to understand that I owe the present honor, not to our former friendship, but to the fact of having with me an attractive friend," in tones of offended dignity, with a knowing twinkle in the black eyes.

"Exactly," with provoking gravity.

"You would not have been so ungallant three months ago. Ah me!" she sighed deprecatingly, "that comes of being married. How soon the popular 'Miss' sinks into an insignificant 'Mrs.'!—a mere nonentity, in fact, remembered only on certain convenient occasions."

Myra was slow in joining them, and the anxious hostess, to fill up the interval, regaled the traveler with choice fruits, chatting incessantly all the while, until losing patience, she sent the house maid, and finally went herself, for the purpose of hurrying that very dilatory young lady.

When Jerome left home nothing was farther from his thoughts than seeing the girl whom he had found, on their last meeting, growing too dear to him; neither had he, in this conventional call, the remotest intention of precipitating himself into a declaration,

or of giving even an intimation of his sentiments toward her. When the truth came home to him, he had very prudently resolved to avoid being too much in her society; that is, to deny himself the pleasure of visiting at her own home, which, under other circumstances, he would have enjoyed greatly, until he had crushed the wild hopes that were fast taking possession of him. Not that he doubted his own heart, but having enlisted in the good cause, with the zeal and self-immolation of a young convert, looked upon his own heart-beats as a secondary consideration, as conflicting with the great life-work which he believed himself called upon to perform. And in his righteous ardor, he fain would root out every selfish longing, and devote himself wholly and exclusively to the regeneration of mankind. Had he retained this state of mind, had kept this heroic resolve, or heeded the warning which he preached unceasingly to his flock: "Yield not to temptation," it would have been well. We say had he done this, it might have saved both trouble and pain. But stumbling upon her so unexpectedly, with several hours at his disposal, and pressed upon by his convivial friend, he could not abstain from feasting his eyes upon her face and his ears upon the music of her voice.

As for Myra, she experienced neither pleasure nor exultation in the admiration awakened in the mind of the young divine. She was, so to speak, as the manes of Limbo, who, wandering upon the border-lands of the lost, with lingering memories of departed happiness, and a vague consciousness of the horrors beyond, sink into a reckless apathy, insensible alike to joy or suffering. She was hardly aware of her power, or that she beheld in this earnest, self-possessed man, one who was, like others had been before him, without wish or intention on her part, a voluntary captive, until aroused from her stoicism by a laughing jest from Henrietta, bringing the color to her cheek, succeeded by an embarrassing silence, as she met the thoughtful eyes bent upon her in eager inquiry. His prospective journey appeared to have come to an abrupt terminus, and the purpose for which he had set out abandoned or postponed. He imagined himself, like Ulysses in Calypso's fairy isle, a spot he was reluctant to quit. He allowed the hour for his train to pass unheeded by, seeming in no hurry to depart, and when he did, with a promise to take tea at the Cottage the ensuing day.

All married persons are, as a natural consequence, inclined, more or less, to be match-makers: those who have drawn a "matrimonial blank," on the principle of "misery loves company," and those who have been more fortunate in their choice, actuated by a philanthropic desire to see the entire human race as happy as themselves. Our young friends belonged to the latter class. Jerome was a special favorite with both: they foresaw his rejection, and sincerely lamented that fate should come between—in their opinion—two kindred souls, so fitted to make each other blest. The subject was discussed with unusual interest, the innocent captor taken to task and "poor Jerome" deeply commiserated.

The night, destined to be an eventful one, was cloudless and serene.

> "All was so still, so soft, in earth and air,
> You scarce would start to meet a spirit there."

But its chaste beauty was lost upon our unhappy heroine: she was nervous and uneasy, and with quickened senses, started at every sound that rent the stillness. She would have confidently affirmed that she had not slept, had she not dreamed—a dream often recalled in after years. She was at Violet Bank, and sat, with Elmer, upon the front portico. They were reconciled, and happy in the revival of love and confidence. They watched the setting sun, as in days agone, as it sunk lower and lower behind the golden rim. Twilight came stealing on, and they sat musing in the lengthening shadows: Hesperus anon blazed above the rainbow tints fast fading from the western sky, and as though in loving approval, shed its amber light full upon them. She called his attention to its unwonted brightness—as typical of their future—when, as they looked, an angry cloud extinguished the heavenly taper; the ether assumed a crimson hue, growing deeper and deeper, until it floated in the distance like a sea of blood. Terrified and wondering, she gazed upon the portentous phenomenon. Her eyes seemed fastened upon some far-away object, from which like a charmed bird, she found it impossible to remove them. A low sound, like an expiring groan, from her companion, disenchanted her. He reeled as she turned, and ere she could catch his arm, fell dead beside her. Speechless with horror, she looked wildly about her. A hideous phantom stood in the back-ground;

the figure was a man's, but the voice a woman's, as, with a fiendish laugh, it vanished in the darkness. Pale and trembling, she stooped to lift the prostrate form. Only the hard granite step met her icy touch; but more horrible than all, at her feet lay an open blade, shining, glittering in the shimmering starlight. In a transport of anguish, she was about to bury the weapon in her own heart, when an unseen hand snatched it from her, and a compassionate voice said, half in prayer, half in entreaty: "God pity you!"

With a desperate struggle she awoke! screaming involuntarily at the apparition that stared back at her from the mirror opposite. She was standing before the bureau, her face ghastly white, her tangled tresses hanging loose and damp about her shoulders; while in one hand she held a small jewel-case, grasping with the other the toy dagger, which had proved her curse. She shrank from herself as she realized the latter, and with a mighty effort, strove to shake off the horrible nightmare—to reason away her fears. But so weird was her appearance in the morning's dusky light, so like the spectre of her dreams, that she stood for a moment motionless and aghast! Apprehensive lest her screams should have alarmed the household, quaking in every limb, afraid of herself and her own thoughts, she crept back to bed like a frightened fawn, and hid her face in the coverlet to shut out the torturous vision.

"I am sorry to have to leave you to-morrow," she said to Henrietta, when Oscar had gone to his business.

"Myra, you astonish me!" cried her hostess in unfeigned wonder, throwing aside the crewel work with which she was engaged, and looking at her with an expression of "What next?" "Will you be kind enough to enlighten me as to the cause of this sudden determination? Have you found us so *very* tiresome that you must rush off in this fashion before you have been here three days?"

"You are fully aware of my admiration for Ivy Cottage and all connected with it," replied her visitor seriously; "but I think it best for me to return home. There! don't ask questions, please," with a glance at the other's puzzled face, "because I can't explain. And," she went on hesitatingly, "don't you think you could excuse me to Mr. Jerome this evening? I had rather not see him."

"Well!" exclaimed her impetuous friend, "this caps the climax! I never accused you of being a flirt before, Myra, but you do act so strangely! You are engaged to one man, and will not allow so much as his name to be mentioned in your hearing; and poor Jerome! I hope you are not—well! I think it is bad enough as it is, without torturing him with suspense."

"Your taunt is uncalled for and undeserved, Henrietta," retorted her companion hotly; "I never *knowingly* tampered with any man's affections."

A darker scarlet dyed the velvet cheek, and Henrietta went about her duties with an injured air, leaving her guest deeply penitent for her hasty words.

She might have disclaimed; might have passed it off as a joke, and laughed at the other's solicitude for the supposed enamorado; but her truthful nature inveighed against this violation of veracity. Still, she might have submitted good-naturedly, have denied the false charge in tones less petulant, had it not been for the conviction that her friend's conjectures were, in the present instance, correct, and the disagreeable consciousness that she must unwittingly have been in some way to blame; but above all, the unfortunate allusion to Fairfield, which, taking into consideration the secret fears—fears of she knew not what—that filled her thoughts, was by no means calculated to increase her amiability, and she naturally felt in no mood for jesting. A change had come over the quiet student as he *thought* he read his fate in the dreamy, far-away gaze of the drooping eyes. A revolution had taken place in thought and feeling. His noble resolutions had melted before that glance, as things lighter than air, revealing his own heart, showing it as it *was*. He had mistaken her reserve, had misinterpreted her confusion; his own love had deceived him; for the first time he dared to hope! And with the glamour came other delusions,—life would be aimless without her; it might be months ere they could meet again; he could not leave her in uncertainty, agony of that exquisite kind that he could think of naught else! he was bewitched; he *must* know the truth; he must know it *now*,—and with his characteristic earnestness and sincerity, he had so looked and acted and spoken, that argue as she might, she could not cheat herself with doubts as to his intentions.

The evening meal, usually so pleasant, was embarrassing to all parties, more especially to Myra, who, in anticipating the wound she must inflict, like every true woman, suffered more in imagination than did her victim in reality.

The clock struck twelve, and still he lingered. He had tried to make her understand that, next to his God, she was dearer to him than all else in heaven and earth. His intelligent face glowed with love and fervor, as, eager and impatient, he sat awaiting his doom.

She had not time to reply; for at this painful crisis, Henrietta, pale and agitated, burst into the room, and without noticing her companion, whispered something, and led her away.

She started and turned white, as she was met in the hall by Lionel! He looked ten years older than when she had last seen him; his features elongated, with deep furrows about the mouth and eyes. Haggard, worn and grief-stricken, never was distress so stamped upon human countenance!

She stepped back, as though she had seen a visitant from the spirit-world, and stared at him in blank amazement. "Mother! father!" she gasped, in a strange, scared tone, with an expression no less dazed and affrighted.

"They are well, thank heaven!" his voice sounded hollow and sepulchral, ending in a stifled groan.

There was another name upon her lips—a name she could not articulate. She trembled, tottered, shrank, and raised her arm as though to ward off a blow, at the same time riveting upon him a look so wild, so questioning, so imploring, as burnt itself in his very soul, and demanded a reply.

The strong man quailed beneath her gaze. He, who had never known fear, sickened at the thought of his cruel task and cowered at the dumb anguish of the statuesque figure before him. Ruthless fate! to have imposed upon *him*—of all others—the mournful duty which others shirked! And yet, he *must* act; she *must* know; he dare not meet that look, which said as plainly as look could say: "Speak." He came nearer and took her hand; kindly and gently he drew her to a seat. "Myra!" he said with an effort, "I have sad news for you."

She looked up; her eyes filled; her lips parted, quivered, as she waited in breathless anxiety for what he might have to impart.

"Myra!" he began again, anxious to have it over, still longing to put it off; fearing to seem abrupt, yet dreading suspense; he hesitated, lingered over her name, as though gathering courage to go on. "Myra!—one who is dear to us both—our friend—" his voice trembled; "Elmer—" he faltered; "Elmer—" he could get no further; his tongue seemed palsied. He tried to repeat it, and broke down in the effort; he could say no more. Why should he, when her own heart whispered the one awful word he could not bring himself to utter?

Her face was ashen white; her hands were icy cold. Not a word, not a syllable, not a sound escaped her. Like a blasted lily, she sank fainting at his feet.

CHAPTER XXII.

A FATAL RENCOUNTER.—SAVED FROM HERSELF.

On Connait l'ami au Besoin.

ELMER knew nothing of Myra's departure until he received the package a few hours later. There was no need to read the accompanying note to tell him its contents, yet it was with feverish haste that he scanned the blotted sheet.

"Had I ever suspected the cause of your indifference, that it was honor alone that bound you; had I ever imagined myself in the way of your winning the woman you love, the friend as false as yourself, the obstacle would have been at once removed. You should have been free, believe me; free to follow the dictates of your deceitful heart. Blind dupe that I was! to have held inviolable the promise which I now revoke. I have seen and heard; it is enough. Attempt no explanation; I do not wish it, and will not hear it. One only request I have to make; it is, that you will never again thrust yourself across my path. I leave home to this end, in order that you may leave ere my return. May God in his mercy deal with you more leniently than you deserve! Henceforth and forever—Farewell!"

He locked himself in his room, where he remained all day, eating nothing, and admitting no one. It was all a mystery, a horrid

mystery, a mystery he could not fathom. "*His* indifference, bound alone by honor, the woman he loved, false friend—false as himself, *he* false? *his* deceitful heart, she had *seen* and *heard*. She had seen and heard *what?* What *did* she, what *could* she, mean?" Oh the confused thoughts that surged through his brain! "Holy powers!" how his head whirled until he staggered under his perplexity!

He paced the room in agitation. "'Attempt no explanation;' he *would*. 'I do not wish it, and will not hear it;' she *should*. What? *he* dishonorable? he would vindicate that honor, ay, though it cost his heart's best blood. 'He must never thrust himself again across her path;' she should be obeyed; she should never be compelled to look upon a face that had become obnoxious to her. Broad seas should divide them; he would drag out his remaining years in lonely exile, until a merciful Providence should call him from a life which had now no charms for him. 'May God in his mercy deal with you more leniently than you deserve!' Did he deserve *this?* 'Henceforth and forever—Farewell!' it should be as she had said: Farewell! and farewell forever!"

He did not go on the morrow, as he had intended, but lingered, why, or for what, he knew not, except that it was hard to tear himself from a spot which she had made so bright, and which, though all was lost, possessed for him a fascination he could not explain.

Lionel had been a silent, but by no means an indifferent spectator. He guessed the truth at once; and as he sat alone to-night, his thoughts went back to his own youth, with its hopes and disappointments, and later, to that other dream, which had ended, like the first, in *nothing*. His heart yearned toward the unhappy lover, who, ardent and sensitive, was less fitted to cope with sorrow and with whom no one could sympathize better than himself. It was time to interfere, he thought, and with this conviction he sought his lodgings. Gaining admittance with some difficulty, he found him haggard and miserable indeed, brooding in secret over wounded love and outraged honor, ungrateful for his company, annoyed at his presence, evading inquiry, taciturn almost to rudeness, yet more gloomy than angry, until moved by the evident solicitude and sympathy of the other, he was at length drawn into a confession.

At this juncture there came a low tap at the door, answered by a petulant "Come in," when what was their surprise to behold in the intruders, McLyons and a couple of select friends, who had fallen, like their more susceptible sisters, victims to his witchery. Fairfield, haughty to the last degree, but to keep within bounds of politeness, bowed distantly and offered seats.

"Thank you," said the former, with an insolent drawl and significant smile; "I merely called on a matter of business—a delicate affair, by the way—but hope you will excuse, seeing the motive is pure. I understand—that is, aw—I have reasons to suppose that you are the victim of a hopeless attachment for Miss Marston, and to prove that I bear no malice on old scores, would like to do you a good turn by alleviating, if possible, the pangs of a fellow-sufferer. The girl is a flirt, a despicable flirt, and *not* an accomplished one at that. She tried to play the same game on me, and I thought I would just show you these," throwing upon the table an envelope, from which slipped a photograph, "and let you judge—aw—" He was not allowed to complete the sentence.

Elmer's eyes were no longer black; they were balls of livid flame. He was no longer handsome; his features were distorted out of all resemblance to himself. He did not stop to inquire through what means he had obtained the articles in his possession. It did not occur to him that the picture might possibly have been one she had given Florence. He only saw the penmanship—it was *hers*, and Myra's familiar physiognomy smiling back at him. Quicker than thought, with one distracted yell, the impetus of a maniac and the strength of a Titan, he leaped upon his assailant and clutched his throat with an iron grip. In another instant McLyons must have ceased breathing. The witnesses rushed forward to separate them; but ere they did, his grasp relaxed, the wild glare faded from his eyes, the expression softened, and he would have fallen had not Lionel caught him in his arms. A crimson stream flowed from his side. Elmer had fainted! Medical aid was instantly summoned, but all efforts to stanch the wound were vain. Death, at last, claimed its own. When, in the general excitement and confusion, their thoughts turned again upon the assassin, he was not to be found. The villain had fled!

Lionel refused to quit the bedside of the dying man, but watched him tenderly and faithfully, like an affectionate brother.

For several hours the spirit wrestled with the clay, but only a few lucid moments were granted him, in which to make his last behest. "Give her that," he said, indicating the half-open package, whose contents lay strewn about the table, "ask her to fulfil my trust—she will understand—and—and—" his breath came thick and short, "tell her—tell her—I forgive her all!" His voice ended in a whisper.

"The soul, too soft its ills to bear,
Had left our mortal hemisphere,
And sought, in better world, the meed
To blameless life by Heaven decreed."

A week later Lionel was riding over the road between Violet Bank and B——, when, upon approaching the bridge, he thought he caught sight of something a little way down the river, like a white dress, fluttering in the breeze. It was near midnight, no moon was visible, and the stars were chary of their sheen. He reined in his horse and looked again. A female figure was plainly traceable against the dark background. He dismounted, tied his steed, and crept cautiously toward her, lest he might startle the somnambulist in her nocturnal meander. She was hard upon the water's edge, and he was now within three feet of her. A wild fear came over him and his heart throbbed violently, as, throwing back her head to shake out its wealth of ringlets, he recognized the features in the pale starlight. Her hands were clasped a moment, as though in prayer; then a plunge, and she was seen no more. He had anticipated her suicidal intent, and leaping in after her, lifted the dripping form, shook her, chafed her hands, and did what he could to call back the life she so little valued.

Presently the large eyes opened wide, and resting them upon his face, she gazed at him long and earnestly. A glad smile rippled over the delicate lineaments. "Ah! Elmer," she said softly, "I thought I would find you here. They told me you were dead. I said it was all a horrible dream, a hideous mockery. I knew you could not die; heroes never die. I thought I should find you here; you always loved the river—you loved the daffodils and water-lilies. I came to gather a posy for you. But why did you leave me, Elmer? Why were you away so long? How dreary the years have been since you left me! And now you are old

and I am old. But you will never leave me again? Promise that you won't!"

"Myra!" he said, coaxingly, "Myra! what are you saying? How came you here? Let me take you home!"

His voice recalled her. Startled and wondering, she shrunk from him, raised herself and sat upright, staring at him questioningly. "Who is this? Where am I?" putting her hand to her head, in a dazed way. "Oh! I remember!" in piteous accents. Then, resting her head upon her hand, she remained silent for some minutes, as though lost in thought. "Lionel!" she said, at length, "why did you stop me? It was unkind."

"Myra! Myra! you do not know what you are saying. This is neither the place nor the hour for you to be alone. Come! I will take you home."

"Home!" reproachfully, "I was going home, but you would not let me."

"Well, we will go now;" willing to humor the whim.

"Ah! you do not know what I mean." A strange light beamed from those wondrous eyes; a new beauty overspread the mobile features, unlike anything he had ever seen there before, angelic in its purity, as, lifting her finger reverently upward, there came a subdued whisper: "my home is there."

Lionel wrung his hands in anguish. "Myra, come! you must not stay here. The night air is chill. You will take cold. You must ride my horse. Let me help you in the saddle. I will walk and keep near you."

She gazed at him vacantly. Then she laughed foolishly. Suddenly she stopped and listened, as though to catch some far-off sound. "Isn't that music entrancing?" she exclaimed, in a rapture of delight. The hazel orbs twinkled mischievously: "No," she said, archly, "I can't sing for you: I shall sing for Elmer."

The strong man groaned aloud. Myra was insane!

It was midwinter when Myra awoke to consciousness and reason. But whose house was this? Where was she? This was her own room, and yet it was not. These were her books, her pictures, her *fauteuil*; and yet, there was a certain strangeness she could not understand. And these faces at the bedside—whose were

they? That aged and placid countenance—whose was it? Ah! Mrs. Harrison. Dear, kind old lady! How thoughtful in her to visit her little friend! But that other?—whose was it? Familiar, yet not easily located. What? Could it be? Miss Ray, her beloved instructress! why was *she* here? And where the tender mother, upon whose loving arm she had pillowed her aching head and sobbed out her infant sorrows? and the proud, fond father? Why had they forsaken her in this, her unsupportable hour of grief and suffering?

The common story. Brief, simple, mournful epitome of terrestrial instability! The stroke had proved too fell for the gentle mother. The mental shock had made war upon the physical constitution, and the inherent disease, so long inactive, now rapidly developed in its most malignant form, hastening the troubled soul prematurely into eternity. "Troubles never come singly." This is an old saying, but one which will be trite only when man is extinct. Through inattention to business, speculations had failed, property had fallen, and the stricken father stood by a lonely hearth—*a ruined man!* His wealth all gone, his idolized wife snatched from his very arms, his child insane, with penury staring him in the face, shaken as he was, it was not surprising that the illness, brought on by grief and anxious watching, soon laid him asleep by the companion of his earthly pilgrimage. The paternal mansion had passed into the hands of strangers, the familiar trifles which she now saw having been saved by Lionel from the general wreck. *Sic transit*, etc.!

Myra's insanity had been only temporary, but the exposure consequent upon her midnight ramble had occasioned severe illness, which, in her present distempered state of mind, had ended in brain fever, from which it seemed she would never rally. Miss Ray, on hearing of her many and sad afflictions, with an abiding affection for her former pupil—now doubly dear through her connection with her young kinsman—had hastened to her side, and tended her not less faithfully than when, on a previous occasion, she had fallen sick, far from home and friends. They had thought it best to remove her from such harrowing scenes. Hence the reason for finding herself not at Violet Bank, but at Mrs. Harrison's. It was a distressing, a cruel duty to tell her this, and how it was accomplished would be difficult to tell.

Weep orphan! weep! Weep till your tears are brine; weep yourself, like Niobe, to stone, or into tear-distilling trees, like Phaëthon's sisters. Tear out your eyes, like Priam's queen; you cannot bring the dead to life; you cannot undo the irrevocable past. Long and loudly may you cry: "Let Myra die, since all that she held dear has ceased to be!" Your cry is vain; Azrael is a fastidious sprite; he turns with scorn and high disdain from the lowly wretch, and seeks rather the happy, gifted and beloved. Grief is too pure, too sacred a thing to be looked upon by profane or unsympathetic eyes, and so, dear reader, we will draw the curtain and leave her to her sorrow, while we look after the lesser *dramatis personæ* of our humble story.

Friendship is of two kinds: one a summer flower,

> "Whose flattering leaves, that shadow'd us in
> Our prosperity, with the least gust drop off
> In th' autumn of adversity!"

The other, like a hardy evergreen, is never so fresh or beautiful as when, in desolate wastes of snow and ice, it stands solitary and alone, spreading its branches proudly heavenward. It was to the former that the poet alluded when he said:

> "And what is friendship but a name,
> A charm, that lulls to sleep;
> A shade that follows wealth or fame,
> And leaves the wretch to weep."

The latter, like a precious gem, is more priceless for its rarity.

Where were the crowds that thronged the rich man's house, partook of the rich man's hospitality, and offered adulation to the rich man's daughter? Where were they? Gone, like a fleeting fancy! gone, like the phantasmagoria of a shifting dream! Old acquaintances looked with stony eyes and inward exultation upon the downfall of this once haughty spirit, while the less discreet, whom policy had hitherto restrained, gloated, like meagre vultures, over her calamities. All the secret envy and suppressed malice was now poured in pitiless showers upon the innocent head of the penniless orphan. Well for her that in those dark days there were a few noble souls ever near to defend and soothe.

It is an old, hackneyed, but a well substantiated fact, and one which cannot be too often cited—let a pauper steal a pittance

to prevent starvation, he is railed at and despised; let a nabob default for millions or commit capital crime, he is a gentleman and a hero. McLyons had been brought to justice, tried and acquitted. A convict? No!—Astræa had indeed ascended! With men a lion, with women something more, ambrosian collations furnished his prison banquet, rare exotics decked his prison toilet. Surely even a villain must sicken with disgust at the gross encomiums lavished upon him. Women! *beware.*

Mother! would you see that innocent babe, whose dimpled arms are clasped about your neck, to whose cherub lips you cling in speechless fondness; would you see that child, the darling of your existence, a bandit or a murderer? or if it be a daughter, would you see that child wedded to a knave? Ah! clasp it closer to your heart and ask yourself the question. Remember that the children of our first mother suffered for her folly.

Look, sister, upon that generous, high-minded brother, whose joys and sorrows you have shared since infancy, the hope and comfort of aged parents. Would you see his frank, youthful brow clouded by despair, his native honor tainted with infamy or soiled with crime?

And you, wife! would you see that loving husband, whose happiness is, or *ought* to be, dearer than your own, racked by remorse, a disgrace to his children and his wife; would you see him plunged in ruin, wretched in life, miserable in death, hurled into perdition, and by *you?* Oh! then, *beware.* God pity him who trusts his happiness to the fidelity of such an one!

Oh, woman! "guardian of your nation's honor," how little you realize the responsibility of your office! It lies with you to wreck or save—like clay in the hands of the potter, it is for you to mould unto honor or dishonor, for weal or woe, knaves or heroes! Which shall it be?

So long as women, "Heav'n's last best gift," decorate the graves of criminals,* treasure their mementoes and extol their valor; so long as they countenance, nay, *encourage* vice, falsehood and corruption will flourish in our land. When our women are *all* true, then will the dove fold her wings over the home of the Olive and our own Columbia will be a new Arcadia. She who is guilty of the former is not a woman. False to her father, false to her

*Note.—An allusion to the James Brothers.

brother, false to her husband, false to her child, a traitor to her sex, and a blasphemer of her God,—woman is a holy name, pollute it not!—call her, rather, *a fiend incarnate!*

Nothing had been heard from Florence since her departure. Did you expect it? She had been the friend of Miss Marston, the heiress; Myra Marston, the dependent, was unknown to her. Besides, had it been otherwise, there would have been no need to perpetuate the intimacy. She had achieved her end; since she had been cheated of the man she loved, tit for tat, she had only retaliated. She had spent her vengeance, and secured a rich husband in the bargain, which being accomplished, she felt no further concern about her, and she might go—well! no matter where, so long as she conflicted with no plans of hers.

"I always knew that girl was fast," said Henry Sims to an applauding audience; "I would have married Florence Stillbury but for her. She influenced her against me, just as she might entrap me herself. But pshaw! she wasn't going to wheedle *me*. Don't you remember that time she asked me to dance?"

"I tell you what, gentlemen," chimed in Rodolphus, like the low braggart that he was, "in future I shall consider it an insult to be teased about that girl. I'll have you to understand that I'll not have my name coupled with a pauper's. All I wish is, that I had back the money I've spent on her."

Aunt Jemima, whose affection for her "young mistis" had never wavered, chanced to overhear these characteristic remarks, and in her righteous ire, hastened to Lionel with a torrent of invectives against "dem low-lived white boys." A cutting, and public rebuke for the former, and a threatened castigation for the latter, served to silence both effectually.

The Misses Philips were furnished with gossip for months to come; but Mrs. Fudge, poor lady! had, by some fatality, been off on a visit (she was fond of visiting) during the correspondence, in consequence of which, the duties of the office had devolved, for the time, upon her liege lord, who had failed to report the circumstance. This was an offence for which she could *never* forgive him, this slur upon her sagacity, this reflection on her omniscience. She took said Fudge to task for his remissness, berating him energetically, interspersing her tirade with hints of a

divorce suit, when, her wrath having reached its acme, an audible snore causing her to turn her eyes in the direction from whence the sound proceeded, she discovered that oscitant individual peacefully reclining in the arms of Morpheus; whereupon, his maltreated spouse went into hysterics, and vowed she would take strychnine, declaring that there was no satisfaction in life any way, and that her husband had no respect for her.

Henrietta and Oscar had grieved as for a sister. They were communicated with daily; the former had come once, and the latter thrice, to ascertain in person the real condition of the invalid. Jerome had done what he could; he had given his sympathy and his prayers.

Then followed weary weeks of convalescence, and the orphan was constrained to turn her thoughts once more to a dreary, aimless future.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE NEW LIFE.

AS Myra lay, day after day, upon her downy couch, with no actual pain, only weak, oh! so weak and despondent, she thought that Miss Ray looked more like a good angel than ever; she moved about the room so softly, shook her pillow so gently, and stroked her brow so tenderly. She ventured to say so one day, whereupon, the self-installed nurse only kissed the pale cheek of the little sufferer, and with a half-murmured: "Poor little wight!" bent lower over the embroidered rose-buds fast swelling beneath her nimble fingers. Lionel's unobtrusive sympathy was equally appreciated; still the nights seemed endless, and the long, bright, monotonous days not less cheerless to the bereaved orphan. She tried hard to get well, not that there was anything worth living for, she told herself, but she had been so troublesome already, and could not bear to be a burden to the few friends who had been spared to her. She had grown very silent, very thoughtful now, for with returning strength had come the stern realization that she was entirely alone in the world, with no near relative upon

whom she could depend for assistance or advice, with sorrow for her companion and poverty for her portion; that she would have in future no income save that derived from her own exertions; that she was only eighteen, and would, in all probability, live many years; that it was incumbent upon her to earn her own sustenance; she must get employment of some kind. True, Lionel had begged a brother's prerogative in providing for her wants, but while she was moved by his kindness, her woman's soul revolted at the bare suggestion. Oscar and Henrietta had likewise insisted that she should make theirs hers, until she should find a more congenial home; but she had no claims upon their bounty, hence, all such eleemosynary tenders were, although feelingly, stoutly declined, while her active brain was busy in devising plans for that desolate future, which she now looked upon as a vast and trackless desert, with no cooling fount, no refreshing oasis, and over which she must journey without guide or compass. She thought with loving gratitude of the dead father, who had left her, though penniless, not utterly destitute. She still had her talents and education; with these she could never be a mean dependent. She would never disgrace his name; though poor, his child should never be a beggar.

She opened her mind to Miss Ray, who commended her noble resolve, and promised to aid her in finding a situation. Fortunately she had a cousin in Texas, Edward Early, M. D., who was just then in need of a governess, and had asked her to recommend some one to fill the vacancy. To him she would send her. It was a long way off, she said, but Edward Early was a good man and a gentleman, and in his charge she would feel satisfied to intrust her.

It was touching to witness her struggles to bear up under her afflictions, to *seem* hopeful for the sake of those to whom she owed so much; but these temporary gleams were invariably succeeded by deeper despondency, and the assumed cheerfulness ended in fresh bursts of emotion. Grief alone rarely kills, but it shatters the physical and unnerves the mental systems; and though youth at last triumphed, it was not until the violets filled with their delicate odors the atmosphere of her old home, that she was sufficiently restored to embark upon the new and unpromising life before her. It was a sad day when she visited for

the last time those new-made graves, and watered their tender verdure with briny tears. No one dared obtrude upon the sacredness of that hour, but Myra imagined that the willow boughs drooped lower, that the zephyrs breathed a sympathetic sigh, and that the violets were paler and less fragrant than of yore, as though they knew and shared her sorrow.

Few noticed the little black-robed figure nestling upon the last seat of the crowded car like a timid fledgling; but those who did, saw a very white, very pensive little face, with a pair of large, slumberous eyes, to which the wan cheek imparted supernatural lustre. There was something unusually attractive in that youthful countenance, character in every outline, gentle birth and intellectual grace in every fold of the simple attire. There was a strange wistfulness in the far-away look that could not fail to strike even a careless observer, and inspire all who remarked it with awe, if not pity. But it was only an occasional glance that she vouchsafed her fellow-passengers, as now and then, by some unconscious movement, the sable veil fell back, revealing, for a moment, the chaste lineaments of the fair mourner. You would hardly have believed her conscious of aught around her, had she not shrunk involuntarily whenever any one approached, as though she would avoid the cold stare of curious eyes. She addressed no one, and no one addressed her; her discursive thoughts were wandering amid other scenes. It was with a heavy heart that she had bidden adieu to her faithful friends, and turned her back upon the familiar haunts around which memory still fondly hovered. "And yet," she asked herself, "why should I care to stay?" Reason could find no answer. Then she drifted on into that uncertain future, wondering what it would be like, what new trials it would bring to her, for surely it could have in store little else—trouble being her only inheritance. But had not the phials of tribulation been emptied for her? What calamity could Heaven send that could be compared with those already heaped upon her? Oh that she might lift the veil! what a comfort it would be to feel that some straggling beam might even yet penetrate the noisome fogs that clouded her pathway.

On the second evening of her westward journey, there was, during a brief stoppage, an unusual commotion among the passengers to make way for a bridal party. Aroused from her half

slumber, Myra looked with the rest, and as couple after couple filed by, awaited listlessly the entrance of the distinguished pair. She shuddered and clutched the cushion convulsively, so great was her astonishment (and yet she had no reason to be astonished either, only the apparition was so unexpected) as her false friend and her confederate, the villainous assassin, swept majestically past. Florence, she thought, surpassed herself; she had never seen her look so witchingly beautiful. Meanwhile, the victim of her treachery was propounding the mental query: "Can she enjoy this hollow pageantry purchased at such a cost?" and then a sigh, half bitter, half contemptuous: "Oh that the heart were as pure as the outward seeming!"

They sat where the light beamed full upon their faces. Recovering from the shock, she raised her veil, and fastened a piercing gaze upon them. The groom was elegant and uxorious, the bride radiant and charmingly vivacious. In the midst of their playful badinage, the latter, chancing to cast her eyes in that direction, saw Banquo's ghost (personated in the present instance by her forsaken friend) rise mockingly from out the dark corner. The face looked whiter, and the eyes dilated to twice their natural size in the morbid imagination of a guilty conscience. A sudden change came over her; she might have been seized with an ague from the shiver that ran through her frame, and though she laughed lightly, her manner was constrained, and she was unable to resume her former gayety. The husband of an hour might have inquired if she had seen a spirit; she had seen worse, for

> "What spectre can the charnel send
> So dreadful as an injur'd friend?"

Myra found many trials and relief too in her new position. It proved a blessing in one particular at least; it demanded all her time, thoughts and energies, and left the mind no leisure to prey upon the past. The fiery ordeal through which she had just passed had taught her some hard but profitable lessons, not the least of which were submission and humility. The crucible of sorrow had purged her character of its dross; pride had taken wing under the rod of the Chastener, and the old hauteur had been superseded by timidity, a soft habitual sadness. With the recollection of her dependence ever present with her, she entered

upon her duties with conscientious zeal, resolving, with divine help, to do her duty in that state of life unto which it had pleased God to call her.

Dr. Early's residence was on the outskirts of a small hamlet, the society of which was, for the most part, coarse and uncultivated, and often odious to the native refinement of the little stranger. For himself, Miss Ray had not overlauded him. In a word, he was a *gentleman*, intelligent, considerate and liberal. With the wife, a kind motherly woman, with ever a place in her large heart for the afflicted and oppressed, and Rose and Annie, two amiable, sprightly little girls, ready to bestow their wealth of childish affection upon their new teacher, they made an interesting family; and surely if there was peace for her on earth, it was to be found here. She well knew to whom she was indebted for the courtesies she now received, and with the additional stimulus of feeling herself respected and appreciated, she soon won the hearts of the entire household. These kindly benefactors interested themselves actively in her behalf, and ere she had been many weeks under their roof, so numerous were the demands for her services, that her school swelled to a goodly number, and she was compelled to turn away more than one would-be patron.

With these promiscuous classes she was often doomed to disappointment and vexation. There were certain antiquated volumes from which they had gleaned their scanty store of rudimental knowledge, and they insisted that the education of their progeny should be conducted on the same obsolete system. In vain did she protest, arguing advancement and improvement. It was as chaff to the wind; *they* were educated, *they* had gotten through the world without worrying their brains with any of this "new-fangled nonsense," and their children might do the same. Then there was Mrs. Highflyer, a *parvenu* aristocrat, who thought her bullion was, or *should* be, a passport among the upper ten, and having conferred the inestimable honor of intrusting to her the primary education of her second daughter, looked down upon and patronized the little instructress, who tolerated her insolence, partly through contempt, but more for the sake of the pupil, who was modest and dutiful, altogether different from the supercilious sister and flaunting mother, and to whom she was sincerely attached. But the most novel and ludicrous incident in her varied

experience was that of an illiterate herdsman, who, having amassed considerable property, and ambitious for the advancement of his family, sent his two eldest promptly and regularly, until, after some three months or more, he stopped them suddenly, without warning, and with no apparent reason for his singular conduct. Upon investigation, it was found that his dissatisfaction arose simply from the fact, that "that young thing had got a kink in her head about the world's turning over."

"I tell you what it is," he said, in relating the circumstance to a neighbor, "I can't afford to pay my hard earnings to have my child'en learnt any sich humbugry. Why, don't you know, sir," waxing warm and vehement, "don't you, don't *every*body, know that if the world turned over all the water would run out of my gum spring?"

There was much to contend with, but there was a ray of consolation in feeling that she was of some use to herself and others, that she was not a mere drone in the great, busy world; and she found that in active, honest and conscientious labor, that most effectual of all balms for the troubled heart, there was satisfaction if not content.

"Yes," soliloquized Myra, when she had been four years in her new home, "I have suffered much, but I have much to be thankful for." And she had. Four years had wrought obvious changes in the pale, grief-stricken girl who had brought her wan cheeks and wasted figure to the good Doctor's Texas home; but she was still young and fair, although her beauty was of a more decided, more womanly type than in the old days. The impetuous vivacity, the elastic spirit were gone, and you saw now a quiet, thoughtful, but not less engaging woman. Yes, she had much to be thankful for. She still had her old friends, from whom she often heard, and new ones had been raised up to her. She had done her part nobly and well, and her humble labors had not been wholly unrequited. She had sown the seeds of kindness, and was reaping the golden harvest. The high ambition of early years had been crushed out by the intoxication of pleasure and the scourge of affliction; she had won no laurels, but she had won what was better, she had won esteem. She had the respect of all who knew her, and the affection of her pupils, which was a

boon not to be scorned by the thirsting heart of a portionless orphan; and right grateful she was for her good fortune in finding such a haven.

Lionel had proved himself a worthy brother, and she began to think that she had never fully appreciated the true nobility of his character. She had thought much of him lately; whether it was the knowledge of his mother's failing health, or the languor of early spring that recalled so vividly those balmy, cloudless, dreary, endless days four years back, when she was lonely, wretched, and they took her in; sick, and they nursed her; weary, and they held her up—she knew not; but in reviewing the past, it seemed that he had been her good genius—by some mysterious means, always on the spot to rescue her from peril. How she thanked him now for saving her from that bold, rash act that would have wrung the hearts of those most dear, and blasted for her the joys of eternity. She had learned from him the highest and noblest of all lessons, the lesson of endurance. In this undemonstrative, uncomplaining, self-sacrificing man she was beginning to recognize the embodiment of *true heroism;* and when she remembered his many kindnesses toward her and her loved ones, there arose from her woman's soul a longing to atone.

"What is admiration?" she said aloud; "what is this thing which the world terms 'popularity'? It is a deceitful, hollow cheat. Like a sweet, poisonous breeze, it fans the cheek, while it withers the heart, scorches the soul and warps the intellect; or, like the apple of the Asphalt Lake, beautiful from afar—pluck it, 'tis ashes within. Better to be loved by few, than flattered and mocked by many."

It was a glorious night, too glorious for slumber: her apartments were apart from those of the family, and she would disturb no one by her lonely vigil. She threw herself upon a low ottoman by the window, and sat studying the astral arch after her accustomed fashion. She was soon launched upon the sea of long ago, an indulgence she not often allowed herself. She had tutored her thoughts to meet the iron-faced present, to peer sometimes into the shadowy future, but called home the fugitives when they verged too near upon retrospection. But at moments like these, so softly, so silently they stole o'er her, that ere she was aware, she had glided out upon the fairy main.

The hall clock struck one. No matter; heart and soul were awake; she could not sleep. Presently she got to searching over mementoes of former days, adding the last touch of reality to the scenes which reminiscence painted. Here were relics of childhood, of school days, but more than all, of that brief and checkered youth, each wreathed in brightest garlands culled from memory's bower. The quaint jewel case, a gift from the fond mother, was among the rest. She unclasped it lovingly. Here were sundry trinkets, each calling to mind some scene of mirth, some happy revel, and each in turn apostrophized. Then came those sadder, sweeter remembrancers of the departed.

A dainty locket, containing her parents' pictures, was there. "Mother! father!' she exclaimed tearfully; "how little I thought, when you gave me these, that they would so soon be all I would have to feed my orphan eyes upon, all I would have to caress! Why did you leave your child? or why did you not take her with you?"

Elmer's first gift was there. She lifted it reverently. "Ah, Elmer!" she went on regretfully, "little did you imagine, when boyish caprice prompted you to wear this ugly bauble, that it was prognostic of your doom; much less did you think, when you placed it in the hands of a frightened babe to hush its choking sobs, that you were furnishing her with a weapon with which to take yours in exchange for the life you had just saved. Strange and hard that *I* should have been the blind agent through which your destiny was to be accomplished! What happiness might have been ours had the Fates been less inimical!"

The solitaire ring was there. "Poor Miss Ray!" she sighed, examining more closely the brilliant gem. "What a lot has been hers! This, like the other, could tell a mournful tale. Would that I were spared my painful commission, for well I know that she would rather believe him dead than such as he now is. How shall I ever fulfil it? How am I to know when her wretched lover is called to his last account? Perhaps he is already dead. O! that he repented before it was too late. Is there nothing then on earth but crime, remorse, grief and tears? and yet, the world is not all bad. Why heeded we not his warning? how different it might have been! Why must mortals doubt and suffer? But human nature is so frail, so suspicious, so distrustful, and yet so credulous. Like a storm-tossed vessel, beat about with the rest-

less tide, driven from its track by angry gales, lured into whirlpools by pleasant breezes, stranded upon shallows by the heaving billows, with a mirage of verdant isles always in view, yet never attainable. But what am I saying? Made we ourselves? Who am I that I should dictate to God? It were better so, else it would never have been. And think not that I reproach you, Elmer, for was not I more blamable than you? and as deeply as I have mourned you, rather would I have it thus than to see upon your brow the mark of Cain, for he who takes the life of a fellow-man is no less a fratricide than he. And the caitiff, thy murderer! where is he? Let the world shower her honors upon him, it cannot stay the phantom that dogs his steps. Nay, worse; from the blood of every murdered man there arises a Nemesis, his own avenger! Not, as with the phœnix, a reproduction of the living, but a pale spectre, a gory corse, that clasps his assassin in a cold embrace, and, like 'The Old Man of the Sea,' waking or sleeping, he is there, he cannot be shaken off. Well may his victim exclaim with the apostle: 'O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?' No, little souvenir!" referring to the former, "though to others unsightly, to me you are sacred, a censer with which to waft on high my soul's best offerings."

She went back to the window. "I wonder why we dream of the dead when it rains? Is there at such times a peculiarity in the condition of the elements that brings them nearer? Is there then some subtile medium through which the spiritual can communicate more directly with the intellectual being? I know not, only at midnight the patter of each raindrop sounds like a whisper from another sphere.

"What is our little world?—a primary school to prepare our minds for deeper mysteries,—a mere atom! less in infinity than an animalcule upon our tiny globe, and yet, how mortals dread to leave it! Why should we fear death? Do we not strive for improvement here? Is there anything appalling in the idea of advancement? Is there anything displeasing in the thought of casting aside this clumsy mass of flesh, left untrammeled to cleave the ether and explore the universe, with eyes to see and minds to understand? When our friends leave us below for foreign lands, do we mourn them as lost, although there is no certainty of meeting

again? If, then, we have an indubitable assurance of meeting in those other realms, why should it be more dreadful? In life they are with us only when face to face; in the spiritual existence they are with us always, watching, guarding, lest the loved ones here should forfeit their inheritance in that brighter kingdom. Is not each ray of light from yon shining orbs the luminous track of some guardian spirit in its earthward flight? What means this ceaseless yearning for the supernal, unless it is that these ministering spirits feed the imagination, giving the young soul faint glimpes of its glories, in order that we may be purer, better, and by striving to do our parts more nobly here, attain higher happiness in the world beyond? Do we not rejoice over the promotion of those we love? Then, when we have every reason to believe them blest, why should we weep for them? rather, why should we not weep for those who are left? Suppose the worm in its chrysalis could know that its nice, cozy nest would be shattered, and it would be turned out in the cold, with no certain dwelling-place, but left to roam at will over what, in its insect eyes, would seem an immensity of space. But with what contempt must the gorgeous butterfly look back upon its former habitation, and recoil at the thought of being again confined within its narrow walls. Who would live always in this vale of tears? Oh! happy spirits, dear in life, doubly dear in eternity, tell me which of yon bright isles you call your home!"

She rose and paced the room thoughtfully. The clock struck three. She looked up, the disagreeable consciousness of a living presence was gradually taking possession of her, followed by sensations the reverse of pleasant. The house was built low upon the ground, with an eye to the destructive cyclones that sometimes swept over that district, and you could easily step from the window upon *terra firma*, without injury or inconvenience; but that vicinage was remarkably peaceable; they were never annoyed with burglars; she was not usually wanting in courage, and this premonitory alarm was new to her. Ashamed of her superstition, yet unable to shake it off, she resolved to satisfy herself. With this intent, she searched the apartment; the furniture and herself were the only occupants. The window was still open; she looked out suspiciously; sleeping nature smiled back at her. Still she was not easy.

She sat down and set about reasoning away her apprehensions. She got a book and attempted to read, thinking thus to divert her thoughts. By an impulse she could not resist, she turned suddenly, when lo! a pair of eyes peeping cautiously through the drawn curtain! Frightened now beyond expression, but with too much self-possession to scream, she extinguished the light, and stole quietly from the room. She had hardly been absent two minutes, when she returned with the household at her heels. Upon entering, all looked as she had left it, except that the eyes were gone, and not a breath stirred the stillness. Her first thoughts were for the jewel-case; she looked where she had left it—upon the toilet-table. *It was not there.*

CHAPTER XXIV.

A TEST OF COURAGE AND FIDELITY.

"Man, while he loves, is never quite depraved;
And woman's triumph, is a lover saved."

MYRA was inconsolable for the loss of her treasures. In this new grief was severed the last tie that linked her to the past. Her heart bled afresh, and she seemed to live over again all the soul-sickening despair, the wild desolation which a loving nature feels, on listening to the dull rattle of frozen clods over the last being upon whose affection kindred or friendship gave a lien. She had a peculiar reverence for these relics of former glories, these friends of happier days, each hallowed by some sweet, sacred memory. She had made confidants of them in her loneliness, communing with them as with living things, had whispered into their deaf ears her hopes, longings and inward struggles, finding in their mute companionship comfort and encouragement. No miser ever guarded his hoard more jealously; not that she valued them for their intrinsic worth, but as mementoes of the loved and lost. She wept as for a dead friend, and would not be comforted.

The detectives were consulted, but to no purpose—with all their skill and energy, their investigations led to nothing. The

thief was evidently an expert, and had taken care to elude any effort to trace him. A month went by, with no news of the missing jewels.

She had abandoned all hope of their recovery, when an occurrence of a singular and somewhat startling nature was destined to prove a crisis in her checkered career—a subtile link in fate's mysterious chain that was drawing her unconsciously on to the most important event of her eventful life, an event that was to solve for her the great problem of the future—that cheerless, dependent future she pictured for herself when age, sickness or some chance misfortune should incapacitate her for earning her own livelihood; when the kind friends with whom she had found a second home would no longer need her services (a certainty not pleasant to think of), and she would be thrown again upon the world, homeless and penniless as before; an event that was to change materially this dismal prospect; that was to clothe the barren waste in summer blossoms, and—to complete the emblem—soften the scorching glare into a mellow glow, and dispel the sultry heat with refreshing dews and odorous breezes; an event fraught with weighty consequences and grave responsibilities, to lead, let us trust, to happy issues.

Upon going to the school-room one morning, more depressed than usual, the rustling, as of paper under her dress, on entering, caused her to turn a little aside, in order to shake it off, the grating noise jarring upon her sensitive ear, when, discovering it to be a soiled slip upon which was some indistinct writing, with a listless curiosity, she picked it up and eyed it suspiciously. It had not been there the evening before when she had gone back after supper for a book she had neglected to take with her. There was no way for it to have gotten there but to have been pushed under the door—probably during the night. But by whom, and why? Certainly by none of the children: they would hardly have thought of such a thing, and could have had no motive. The penmanship was strange to her, too—a fact that gave new interest to the circumstance. It must have been intended for her eyes, it being her custom to be at her desk before the pupils assembled. All things considered, it had the appearance of design. What could it mean? More mysteries!

Such were the thoughts that sped through her brain as she

stood gazing abstractedly at the illegible scrawl. Naturally of a nervous, excitable temperament, the shock of her late adventure, from which her mind had never entirely recovered, tended toward making her doubly so. A sudden faintness came over her, and dropping upon the nearest seat, with a vague anticipation not unmingled with fear, she set about deciphering the mysterious note, if such it could be called. The letters had, apparently, been traced by a masculine hand, notwithstanding they were cramped and blurred, as though written in haste or agitation. After several attempts she succeeded in making it out. It bore neither address nor signature, but said simply:

"By coming in person to the old sugar-house, your jewelry will be restored to you. Have no fears for your safety—no harm will befall you. I am alone, and could not do you injury if I would. I feel that my hours are numbered. Come quick, or it may be too late. You will not deny the humble petition of a dying sinner!"

Myra was sorely wrought upon by the ominous wording of this singular communication. Was it a heartless prank perpetrated by some mischievous urchin, an insidious and direct attempt upon her own life, or was it true? If true, the writer could have been but one—and he was dying! It must have been he, and no one else, for what other robber was capable of magnanimity? Who else would not have claimed the reward offered for the restoration of the stolen jewels? But then, how was he to know anything of her? How was he to know that she was a portionless orphan, and that, in losing these, she had lost what she prized above anything in her possession? And even though he did, would such knowledge be likely to touch the callous heart of one so schooled in depravity and wickedness? Ha! the ring! could it have fallen into his hands?—why not?—and he had recognized it, and the memories it summoned up—haunting memories of youth, and virtue and innocence—had been too much, and—lost as he was in vice and sin—he could not bring himself to plunder one who, perhaps, had known and loved her upon whom he had bestowed his best affections when his soul was the home of honor, truth and purity. The love which, though it had worked his ruin, was the one attenuated thread upon which hung his lingering hopes of heaven. Yes, it was the ring; it must have been. Surely this was the workings of a remorseful conscience: anxiety

to make amends, so far as in his power lay, for the countless errors of the past. But why must she come in person? If it were as she supposed, if her surmises as to the writer were correct, if he felt compunction and wished to make reparation, why could he not deliver them to any one else? Why did he wish to see *her?* Probably with the hope of hearing something of the gentle being he had wronged and whose life he had blighted. What if her conjectures were right, and that he, the wretched wanderer, were really dying?—dying in his guilt and crime! God avert his awful doom!

Fidelity, honor and affection plead in one scale, distrust and apprehension weighed in the other.

Her hands fell nerveless upon her lap. She sat for a long time staring blankly at the floor, unconscious of anything except that she was scared and excited; that she had been seized by some frightful incubus, as the words continued to repeat themselves in her ears, like voices of the dead, while visions of sin and suffering and death swam before her in fearful vividness.

The entrance of her pupils aroused her to action, reminding her that it lacked only a few minutes of school time, and that whatever she intended doing must be decided upon at once.

If not probable, it was possible. The incentive was powerful, and delay might lead to an omission for which she could never forgive herself.

In this dilemma, she resolved to take her trouble to her kind employer. He received her with grave respect, listened to her recital with an expression that might have been amused, could he have made sport of the anxiety and perplexity of a sensitive, excited girl, and scanned the paper which she handed him, in confirmation of her words, rather skeptically. But the name, Martin Willis, was no stranger to his ears, nor was he prepared to listen unmoved to a narrative of which he was the subject. When she ventured to hint at her own conclusions, his countenance changed at her first mention of it—a look of surprise, then latent fire leaped to his eye, and a cold, stern expression settled upon his usually pleasing face. He was anything but a hard-hearted man, however, and as she proceeded with the story, giving it, as near as she could remember, word for word as Elmer had related it on that never-to-be-forgotten winter's evening, his look softened, and

ere its conclusion, she had enlisted both interest and pity in behalf of the unhappy castaway. He, like others, had believed him long since dead; but the dark confession, the accuracy of detail, the recklessness of despair, but above all, those passionate utterances of inconceivable anguish, the unspeakable bitterness of vain regret and self-abhorrence wrung from a tortured breast, and coming as it did from his own lips, gave it an authenticity he could not doubt.

Myra declared herself willing to take the risk, and begged him to accompany her to the tryst.

At this he hesitated. The place in question was a dilapidated building, about a mile from the village, where the rats and mice that found shelter in its ruins banqueted undisturbed, protracting the revel far into the night to the plaintive note of the melancholy whippoorwill. Standing in a sterile, isolated field, it made a desolate picture, with its crumbling walls and mossy roof, the whole presenting an aspect of forlorn loneliness, that, to the superstitious mind, would naturally suggest thoughts of ghosts and goblins; and though it was *not* a deserted castle, and in no way striking or picturesque, it answered in every particular for a haunted house. Myra had often passed it in her walks, and had remarked more than once what an excellent retreat it would be for tramps and thieves.

"My child," said the kindly man, stroking her wavy hair, as another hand had been wont to do in years gone by, "I am afraid that your impulsive romantic disposition will get you into some serious trouble yet. What I have just heard is news to me, and I do not deny that I was affected by it. It throws a veil of charity over what has always seemed an inexplicably heinous and dastardly deed; but my fears are that you will allow sympathy and a strained sense of honor, which you believe conscience dictates, to outweigh discretion, and that in suffering yourself to be led too much by your feelings, you may be imposed upon by the artful machinations of wicked, designing people. What assurance have you that your conjectures are correct? for they are *only* conjectures you must remember. I think it much more probable that it is a trick, played either in malice or mischief. Perhaps—who knows but that it may be a ruse to seize your person? Such things have been done, you know, and there are so many desper-

ate characters in the country now, who kidnap, not only children, but beautiful young ladies. And even though it should turn out as you suppose, what claims has this outlaw upon *you*, an utter stranger of whom he knows nothing, not even your name? What right has he to summon you to such a place and under such circumstances? I would not have you shirk duty, but fidelity to your lover or your teacher does not demand that you should run rashly into an imprudence or risk your life."

"Which is not much," broke in Myra, giving way and beginning to sob, hurt that any one should imagine her unwilling to risk her life to keep a promise to one who had sacrificed his own for her. "Few would miss me were I to lose it," moved by the tone and manner, that reminded her of her father.

"It wounds and distresses me to hear you talk so," he replied with reproachful tenderness, and a forced smile, between the pained and playful. "It would be a waste of words to tell you how dear you have grown to us, that we could scarcely love you more were you our own child. You must feel and know this; but I would also add, that you need never give yourself any uneasiness for the future so long as I or my wife or my children have a home. You have had much sorrow, I know; but you have many friends warm and true, who feel for you deeply in all your troubles and afflictions. The longer and darker the night, more welcome the dawning day, and I cannot help believing that there are brighter days in store for you. Only hope and wait; God, who is all-wise and just, will not suffer the upright and innocent to be long oppressed."

Myra was greatly touched by these sincere and feelingly uttered expressions of affectionate regard and delicate generosity, and though the trickling tears still stole down the flushed cheek, they were of gratitude rather than of grief.

"As for your trinkets and the romantic burglar," he continued in a more cheerful tone, "you may make yourself easy on that score. I intend to go myself and sift the matter to the bottom."

Myra was not so easily satisfied. Elmer, with his dying breath, had imposed this solemn, sacred duty upon her. How could she meet him in that other world, and tell him that he had been so soon forgotten, that she had disregarded his last request? How could she bear his reproaches?

"May I go with you?" she asked timidly.

"If anything comes of it, you shall know in good time."

But the words of the note recurred to her with all their awful significance, their force increasing as her chances of complying with them diminished: "I feel that my hours are numbered; come quick or it may be too late. You will not deny the humble petition of a dying sinner!"

"Please—but why can't I go now?" she persisted, with a slight tremor in her voice, and an anxious, pleading face upturned to the grave thoughtful one just above her.

"My dear child," began the fatherly doctor in gentle dissuasion, when meeting the earnest, wistful look, he broke off abruptly. "Well! well!" he said relentingly, "if you are in search of adventure, get your hat, and we will set off at once. I dare say it is only a hoax after all, and if there is any danger ahead, I can stand between you and harm."

To run for her hat and excuse herself from the school-room required but a minute, and she was back again before he had hardly missed her.

Edward Early was no coward, but he deemed it more prudent to provide against possibilities, so arming himself with a loaded revolver, he declared himself at her service.

The season had been forward, and vegetation was remarkably advanced for April. The soft grass and budding wild flowers scarcely bent beneath her tread, a sense of adventure lending buoyancy to her step and heightened color to her cheek, as Myra tripped away demurely by the side of her trusty protector, counting each moment an hour in her excitement and impatience.

She felt her heart beginning to palpitate with dread and uncertainty as they neared their destination. A deep stillness pervaded the scene. She stopped an instant and listened. A low twitter of birds from a distant tree seemed to mock her fears. She threw an enquiring glance toward her companion.

"Never turn back in sight of the goal," he said, answering her look, determined that, having come thus far, she should not return in doubt.

They had reached the threshold, when a sound, as of a stifled groan, was borne to them. Myra's cheek paled as she paused involuntarily, and her escort felt suddenly ashamed of his precautions.

They proceeded in silence, and guided by the heavy breathing, as of one in extreme pain, which was now quite audible, and which issued from a small room at the opposite end of the tottering structure, they pushed gently against the closed door, whose rusty hinges made a fearful creaking as it yielded to the pressure.

Myra had kept close behind her convoy, but now instinctively held back that he might enter alone, awaiting a sign to follow.

After what seemed to her a great while, but which was, in reality, a few seconds only, he came to the door and beckoned her in. Despite expectation, she started and shrank back at the sight which met her wondering eyes. Upon a small pile of musty straw in the farther corner was stretched, full length, the figure of a man, who though old for his years, had that in his face (a face which, notwithstanding it was now wan and sunken, must once have been exceedingly handsome) which bespoke a high spirit and gentle birth.

The noise aroused him from his stupor. The eyes opened slowly; dark penetrating eyes, lit with a restless, feverish light. A strange eagerness came into them as they rested upon the awe-stricken girl who stood at the side of his rude couch.

"It was good of you to come," he said feebly; "I feared you would not—feared you would not understand—feared it would be too late."

His breathing was labored and utterance painful. His failing strength seemed spent with the effort those few words had cost him; the heavy lids fell again, and he remained for a long time apparently lifeless.

The earnest gaze and mournfully subdued tones pierced Myra's inmost soul. Her jewels, Miss Ray, Elmer, all were forgotten; she thought only of the prostrate form before her, saw only a suffering creature, a dying penitent, as she realized that, for the first time in her life, she stood in the presence of death. She looked appealingly at her companion. He understood the mute query, so simple and yet so touchingly eloquent, which said: "Can nothing be done for him?" and answered in the same voiceless language.

She did not repeat the question; she knew that it was beyond the power of human skill to call back the departing spirit, the dark circles about the eyes and mouth telling too plainly that the

black giant had already laid his icy clutches upon him, and that the pious physician, foreseeing the end, would not mock his last moments with delusive hopes. Dissolution was inevitable, and there was nothing to do but to wait for it.

Myra found the rigid restraint, which she felt it necessary to put upon her feelings, a fearful strain upon her nerves, as she gazed helplessly down upon the motionless form, her brain in a whirl and her presence of mind deserting her. The suspense was becoming insupportable when the eager eyes opened a second time upon her.

If she had forgotten the promise with which he had allured her hither, it was evident that he had not.

"Your casket!" he said, speaking quickly; "look under my head."

She did as he commanded, and drew it forth, whole and uninjured.

"Open it!" he continued, with increasing anxiety.

She obeyed, in silence. All was as she had expected, every precious trifle as when she had last seen it, and a sealed letter addressed to Miss Ray. But dear as were the former, she could feel no pleasure in their restoration at the forfeiture of life.

"The ring!" he demanded, in a voice slightly raised by excitement, and tremulous with emotion; "how came you with it?"

"Elmer—" she began, with an effort.

"Yes, yes," he burst forth, interrupting her; "I know—I heard. Poor boy, he deserved a better fate! You know *her*—Bertha?" he inquired, hurriedly.

"Yes," said Myra, her heart in her throat.

"You will send it to her?—the letter? I could not bear to die until I had told her all—could not bear for her to think me so—so—" Exhaustion forbade his finishing the sentence.

"Yes, I promise;" interpreting the pleading look he bent upon her.

"You are an angel!" she heard him murmur, "like *her*—Bertha! How beautiful my darling was," he rambled on, incoherently.

The kind-hearted doctor had stationed himself near his pillow, from which post he watched him compassionately, but the dying man hardly noticed him. He saw nothing but the slight, girlish

figure, and the pale, agitated face, in which he read only mournful pity, and which his fading eyes never quitted—as though they would devour her in the intensity of his gaze.

"Tell me," he said, after a brief pause, in a deep, hollow tone, that went to the very depths of her heart, "is there no hope for me? Am I utterly lost?"

"No," she answered, confidently, and then hesitated, finding the office of confessor a painful one, feeling that the fate of an immortal soul depended, perhaps, upon her words, and appalled at the responsibility that rested upon her; "not if you are sorry that you have been wicked, and ask God to forgive you," she added, solemnly.

He regarded her for awhile steadily and intently. His expression softened, and something like a tear glistened upon the dark lashes.

"You look so young, and beautiful and innocent," he faltered, at length, "You must be good—like *her*! You do not despise me?"

There was in the appeal mingled tenderness, anguish and entreaty, as though his final doom hung upon her answer; and to Myra, whose emotions already threatened the severe self-control she had so far exercised, it was too much.

"No; from my heart I pity you," she replied brokenly.

He extended his thin hand imploringly toward her. She took it in her own and pressed her soft palm to the cold, damp brow.

"I shall die easier for having seen you," he whispered, faintly. "I have finished now—I am almost gone. Sing to me!"

A stranger to such scenes, she was embarrassed by the unexpected request; but her moral courage rising to meet the emergency, she choked back the rising sobs, and summoning her voice, began a pathetic little air which she remembered to have heard Miss Ray sing sometimes. It was a venture, but she determined to try the experiment.

It seemed a familiar one, for it acted like a spell; and so quietly and gradually the spirit took its flight, that he seemed lulled to rest like a tired child. When the strain ceased, he lay as a sleeping infant upon its mother's lap; but the eyes were fixed, and the pulse was forever still.

Woman's intuition is often superior to man's reasoning, as was

proved in the present instance. Myra's convictions were verified. The fellow who had entered her room by stealth and purloined her ornaments was one of the same gang that had fallen upon Fairfield in his midnight wanderings through the Louisiana swamp, more than five years before. In accordance with their usual custom, they, among other valuable miscellany, had been passed over to their chief, who, by dint of his wit and the power he had acquired over them through the firmness and decision of a higher intellect, which ever awes and sways the vulgar herd, had escaped their vengeance for his suspected treachery upon the occasion alluded to, and who, recognizing the ring with which were associated such harrowing memories, had naturally been impelled to inquire the name and locality of the person in whose possession it had been found. The former he was unable to ascertain, but the latter he learned accidentally, and obeying the dictates of his better nature, he had deserted his band, resolving to contrive an interview at every hazard and abide the consequences; when, ere he had reached his destination, he had been smitten by disease, and in the belief that his end was fast approaching, had penned those hurried lines, and trusting to chance, credulity and humanity, had managed to drag himself to this mean shelter, to die as wretches must!

Thus ends the double tragedy, which is, at the same time, a striking example of the power of early teachings and the lasting influence of a pure and lovely woman.

Dr. Early had the remains quietly interred in the village cemetery, and it was never known outside of his immediate family that the contrite burglar was Martin Willis.

Myra, who was doomed to experience that day yet another shock, was thankful for the distance that necessitated her breaking the melancholy intelligence to her quondam teacher epistolarily, so that she might be spared at least the distress of witnessing the grief which she knew the disclosure would occasion her, although she felt that, the first storm over, it must be a relief.

The exertion, excitement and agitation of the morning had completely overcome her, and she had retired to her room with a nervous headache when the evening's mail was brought to her. A letter directed in Lionel's peculiar, but bold and legible hand, changed the current, but not the tenor of her thoughts. Its per-

usal was unnecessary to acquaint her with its mournful contents; the broad black band upon the envelope told its own sad story; yet she did read it many times.

Yes! she too was dead—that aged and loved mother, for whom he had sacrificed wealth and fame, and whose comfort and pleasure had been, since then, the study of his life. She was no more; the sands of life had run its little hour; another disembodied soul had passed from earth, and flown away to join the spirit band of the city invisible. The one care of his youth and solace of maturer years had been wrested from him, and he was left alone. Alone! with no one to comfort, no one to cheer, no one to love him!

She wept! not less for his affliction than for the loss of the kind friend who had been to her a mother in the dark days of her treble bereavement.

"Poor Lionel!" she sobbed, "that he, who has so suffered and labored and lived for others, should be left thus forlorn!"

Suddenly and impulsively she raised the letter to her lips. For an instant her cheek glowed like a crimson flower; then, as though startled and frightened at her own act, she let it drop from her fingers as suddenly, as though she had committed, or was about to commit, a crime.

Her color came and went, as it ever did with intense feeling.

"I wrong no one," she said aloud, as though denying the charge of some unseen and silent accuser.

Her self-command, her self-respect in a moment asserted itself; her face regained its wonted calm, her cheek its natural hue.

"What am I doing? what am I saying?" she asked herself severely, as picking it up, she laid it quietly aside, and then with a sigh: "He is *only* a brother."

It was a sad sweet task to pen the words of hope and consolation for which he thirsted, to lift him from the abysm into which this great sorrow had plunged him; and treasured was the reply in which he called her his "dear little sister," and thanked her for her sympathy and affection.

CHAPTER XXV.

A CHAPTER OF SURPRISES.

THE world is a mighty battle-field, where vice and virtue are continually at war, and Time the righteous umpire that awards the palm of victory.

The warm delicious breath of June had kissed the spring blossoms into whitening grain and blushing fruits, and Myra, after much persuasion, had been prevailed on to visit once more her native state. Miss Ray, to whom she now seemed bound by a new tie, expressed an earnest wish to see her. Myra had made a shrewd guess when at school, that it was not necessity that had driven her from a social world to which she would have been an ornament. Her father was a man of considerable means, and had left her at his death, which followed hard upon the tragedy of her youth, amply provided for. But wealth and admiration alone could not satisfy the cravings of her woman's soul; her parents both dead and her sisters all married, there being no one to oppose her choice, she had left soon afterwards a beautiful and sumptuous home, seeking self-inflicted and useful labor as the only remedy for

> "The dreary void,
> The leafless desert of the mind,
> The waste of feelings unemploy'd."

But notwithstanding her aversion to residing there, the paternal mansion had been, through all the intervening years, kept up in quite its former state, having been left in charge of the old housekeeper and a few faithful servants, who creditably sustained the family dignity.

Such was the place to which she invited her. Since the concatenation of calamities alluded to, she had felt no inclination to revisit it; but had been suddenly seized with a desire to see the old place again, and designed spending her vacation there, pro-

vided she was favored with her young friend's society. She had never spoken of these things before, had never revealed her real circumstances, since, to have done so, would have been to divulge a painful secret. She dwelt upon the natural beauties of the district, and described the pleasant hours they would spend together; she had set her heart on having her with her, and would accept no excuse.

This was natural. It might be expected that she would wish to see one who had been, not only a witness to the last hours, but the comforter of one whose memory, vile as she had been forced to believe him, had left the lacerated heart-strings forever broken—chords that would never more vibrate with love's responsive thrill; of course there were questions to ask which could not be satisfactorily answered by letter—questions of words and looks and tones, and such exquisite details, unthought and undreamt of except by those who truly love. It was natural that she should wish to wander again among the familiar haunts of her girlhood, rendered intolerable by association while she remembered him as brutal and treacherous. Myra could understand and appreciate, having experienced feelings somewhat similar, and the pupil would fain console the teacher as the teacher had erst consoled the pupil.

Was not she too pining for a sight of her old home?—a home which, though no longer legally hers, must ever claim that place in her affections so long as the earthly remains of those who had bestowed the life which she had at times been selfish and wicked enough to esteem a baleful gift, slept beneath its sod. She sighed for the scenes so dear to her heart—those scenes of vanished joys painted in living colors on memory's varied page,—here a gilded portraiture traced by the roseate finger of life's morning; here, in the noonday of pride and bliss, a cloudless sky suddenly overcast, the thickening clouds and electric flashes portentous of the threatening storm; and last of all, the simple tale of life's direst woe, stamped in sable characters and blotted with an orphan's tears. And the conciousness that the fulfilment of this long-cherished hope now lay in her own will, appealed to her heart more effectually than a volume of elaborate and unanswerable arguments.

Henrietta was not less importunate. She pictured life at Ivy Cottage in glowing language, growing eloquent as she expatiated

on its manifold attractions, offering a catalogue of inducements, each irresistible to one willing to be persuaded.

Then there were other lures, still, that invited her to the land of her birth—lures that she would confess to no living creature, that she dare not confess even to herself; ties other than of friendship, probabilities that she repelled impatiently whenever they obtruded (for obtrude they *would*) upon her thoughts.

On the day of departure the little girls clung to her tearfully, their amiable mother folded her in a warm embrace, and her friendly patron's cordial clasp left her fingers tingling with the lingering pressure, as they bade her a reluctant farewell, their grief at losing her alleviated only by the assurance that her absence was merely temporary, and would not be long. After a little while she would return to them. What other home had she in all the world but this? If life and health were spared her, she would certainly come back.

There had been many changes in B—— and the adjacent country during her four year's expatriation. Some of the older citizens had gone to their final rest, others had moved away, and strangers supplied their places. But the most sensational event of all was Henry Sims' marriage, and I trust the reader will be pleased to recognize in the bride the *youthful*, *naive* and confiding Miss Janet Philips.

How did it come to pass? Why, in the most natural way imaginable. Having occasion to visit C—— a few months before, he had met with Oscar, with whom he had a slight acquaintance, and who, with his accustomed civility, had invited him to call at the cottage.

His pleasure and appreciation being evinced by a speedy compliance, his sportive host, who had not forgotten his treachery in his professed friendship for Myra, partly in a spirit of retaliation and partly for the pure love of a joke (this promising to be a rich one), mentioned casually, in the course of the evening, that Miss Janet Philips was worth a fortune.

At the word "fortune" Mr. Henry's eyes began to dilate delightedly, and his voice, despite his wonted caution, betrayed eagerness, as he proceeded to make some artless inquiries concerning the fortunate fair.

The gay jester, noting the effect of his quiz, with a significant

wink to his merry consort, went on to state, that she had been spending much of her time for the past few years with a wealthy uncle, recently deceased, with whom she had been a great favorite, dropping vague hints which led his guest to suppose that she was the lucky heiress to the bulk of his magnificent estates.

Eager to possess himself of this splendid prize (which perfectly reconciled her thirty one years), his weak and mercenary victim lost no time in seeking an introduction, which was followed up by the most persistent and assiduous attentions. He proposed in form, after a brief acquaintance, and was graciously accepted by the languishing maiden.

Fearing delay, lest he should be supplanted by some successful rival,—of whom he was sure he had more than a score,—with the anxiety and impatience of an ardent lover, he hastened the nuptials, carefully avoiding, in the meantime, anything that could have the appearance of inquiring further into her finances, lest he should wound the sensitive heart of his tender dulcinea, wrecking, thereby, his brilliant prospects.

So it fell out that he remained in blissful ignorance of the imposture until after the honey-moon, when he discovered, to his horror, that she was not worth a penny!

To rush off post haste to Ivy Cottage and vent his spleen on "the knave who had played this villainous trick upon him" was his first thought, and no sooner conceived than acted upon.

That facetious gentleman met him with a cool complaisance that completely shocked him out of his studied noncommittalism and habitual prudence.

"I thought you told me that that woman was a fortune?" he demanded, in a high key, with all the bitterness of disappointment and piquancy of suppressed ire, declining the proffered chair and entering upon the subject without preamble.

"And so she is," replied the other quietly.

"That's false. She is not worth a penny!" excitedly.

"You don't know what you are talking about, man," with the same exasperating coolness; "all women are fortunes—in *themselves!* Why, I wouldn't exchange my wife for the wealth of the Indies!"

"She is not worth a cent," reiterated the unhappy bridegroom, fairly foaming with rage.

"I can't answer for her *cents*, but not much *sense*, truly, else she would never have married Henry Sims," was the withering rejoinder.

"I'll get a divorce *at once!*" his anger getting more ungovernable and his accents sharper.

"What? Not sick of your bargain? Your fervent devotion has not changed to repugnance so soon, surely," with sarcastic emphasis and well-feigned astonishment.

"I'll *insist* upon a separation," ignoring these equivocal insinuations.

"I am afraid you will find some difficulty in making out a case," observed the imperturbable Oscar.

"I say that you have lied!" shrieked the poor wretch, desperately, losing all self-control, heedless alike of words or consequences. "I say that you are a villain—a low, contemptible, lying villain!"

Oscar looked down upon him as an elephant might upon a mosquito that kept a great buzzing about his ears, but was unable to penetrate his leathery hide with its delicate sting.

"If you were a man I would strike you," he said carelessly, "but I would scorn to hurt so weak a thing.

"Go home, my friend," he added, with a sneer; "go back to your love-lorn lady, who is, I doubt not, impatient for her lord's return. Love and cherish her, 'for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health,' as you promised at the marriage altar. You cannot revoke your plighted vow—you have nothing to allege against her. There was no mention of dollars and cents in the ceremony, I wot. Submit with what grace you can. You have brought it on yourself and must accept your fate.

"And now—go!" in a tone that could not be mistaken, "leave my premises this instant, and I warn you to beware, in future, how you insult a gentleman in his own house.

"Go!" peremptorily, seeing him hesitate, "and never come to me again with your puerile threats, wrongs and repinings. If you have made a mistake, take my advice and keep your dissatisfaction and ill-temper to yourself. It will save you some trouble and a world of mortification."

And he went, like a detected thief; this keen ridicule and undisguised contempt being more stunning than a blow.

The wily fortune-hunter had gotten his just deserts. Having "married in haste" he was left to "repent at leisure;" condemned to a life of falsehood and self-reprehension, forced to lament in secret over frustrated schemes, with inward imprecations on his own folly; bound to a woman he despised, eight years his senior, with neither youth nor amiability to redeem her plain features and very ordinary accomplishments.

These interesting details Henrietta had recounted in a recent letter, in a style eminently her own.

Mr. Rodolphus had never ventured to launch his barque a second time upon amorous seas, at the mercy of fortune's treacherous waves and the more fickle breezes of feminine favor. Having learned from his brother's miscalculations the fallacy of appearances, and from his own experience that Plutus was a winged deity and sometimes took flight, he had abandoned all idea of matrimony and given himself up to the blessedness of perpetual bachelorhood.

Jerome, who was on the high road to distinction, had been again enslaved by Love's grand passion, finding a worthy object in fair-haired Maud—like Henrietta in mind and heart—an arrangement entirely agreeable to all concerned.

There was no necessity for Myra's passing through B——; it did not lie in her line of travel; there was no real reason for turning out of her way, except that she could not bear to go so near, without allowing herself the gratification of seeing dear old Violet Bank for perhaps the last time.

It was in the early afternoon when the village spires came in sight. There was no one to meet her; she had no reason to expect anything else, having apprised no one of her intentions; and yet, she could not help hoping—pshaw! how silly she was.

She had thought of acquainting Lionel with her purpose, requesting him to be in attendance on her arrival. A year ago she would have felt no hesitancy in doing so, but was now deterred by a feeling of diffidence she could not explain and would not acknowledge.

Her plan was quickly decided upon. She would hardly be recognized under the thick veil that completely concealed her features; she would discover herself to no one, but go straight to Violet Bank, where she would spend the night, and resume her

journey on the morrow. She had no idea who were the present occupants, but felt sure that, were they friends or foes, they could not have the heart to deny one night's entertainment to the daughter of him who had never refused hospitality to the needy or friendless.

A number of passengers got off, some stopping over, others changing cars, jostling and grumbling; and among so many would-be important personages, it was not likely that such a quiet, insignificant little individual would be remarked. She slipped out of the crowd unobserved, and declining a hack, walked briskly toward the village. The streets at that hour were well-nigh deserted, and the solitary pedestrian she occasionally encountered passed her by unnoticed. She slackened her pace when she had passed the suburbs, and as she strolled slowly down the familiar drive, pausing to look fondly upon each well-remembered object, loitering on the bridge and gazing dreamily down upon the little river suggestive of such mournful reminiscences, she was moved to tears at the retrospection sad and sweet; but when the green steep rose before her, her strength forsook her, and sinking upon the stone step, she waited for some minutes, gathering courage to go on.

The intermediate years of her life were obliterated; she was a child again, awakened from some dreadful nightmare; this, and this only, was her true home; she looked up expectantly, as though she thought to see the forms of her loved ones come forward to soothe and caress her.

Summoning up her resolution, she ascended. Here the contrast struck her most painfully. The buildings were all in perfect repair, and the grounds in the nicest order; but the closed doors and darkened windows pronounced it tenantless. The full consciousness of the present overwhelmed her; she thought of the prodigal son, only there was no feast prepared for her, no music and dancing to welcome her back, feeling like some lonely exile returned to his father-land, who sees a show of joy and mirth around him, but no joy and mirth for him. She wandered about the yard and through the park in search of some sign of life, but could find nothing—not a dog, nor a cat, nor a fowl; all was silent and deserted. At a loss to account for these contradictory evidences, she went finally to the garden, where she sauntered up and down the well-kept walks, plucking here and there a flower, lin-

gering thoughtfully over each sad reminder, until she reached the mound where slumbered her dead. The soft grass offered a seat, the willow branches a canopy. Here she remained for a long time lost in recollections, how long, she did not know, until startled by a footstep near her,—startled as she had been once before in that same retreat, although how differently occupied! when the lost had come back to her. But great as was her surprise, it was not to be compared with that of the intruder.

Another mourner had come to pay his daily visit to that hallowed spot, all unthinking whom he would encounter there. He came to a sudden halt as he spied her; then stepping backward a few paces, stared at her in utter bewilderment, transfixed with amazement.

She in turn stared back at him, not less confounded.

"Can I believe my eyes?" he said at length, like one in a dream, "or is it a ghost that I see?" it was more a soliloquy than a question.

"It is not a ghost at all, but my corporeal self," replied the supposed wraith, finding at last her voice; "It is I, Myra," approaching him with extended hand.

He took it, but was far from being convinced.

"Myra! *you* here?—impossible!" he ejaculated in the same soliloquizing tone. "How did you get here?—where did you come from?—dropped from the clouds?"

Myra explained.

"And now," she added, when she had finished, with something of her old playfulness, "are you satisfied as to my materiality, or will you still persist in believing me a spectre?"

"Almost," he returned, recovering himself in a measure, but still incredulous.

"I should have written—should have notified you," she said apologetically. "I am sorry that I surprised you."

"Sorry that you surprised me!" he echoed in a changed voice, looking down upon her with unspeakable tenderness, "would that my life were made up of such surprises."

Then followed a long conversation, involving mutual questions and explanations, which, being of little interest to the reader, we will just pass over, thus hastening the conclusion of this eventful narrative.

* * * * * * *

"Myra!" he said, when she had given an account of herself, with a perceptible tremor in his low accents, "I told you once that I would never again distress you with the story of my love. I had meant to keep my promise—but all is so changed since then. I am so lonely, Myra! I would not have you forget—I do not ask your love—I am content with what I already possess. Only give me the right to keep you from hardship—the right to protect—the right to make you happy. We are both alone: let us comfort each other!"

A wonderful revolution was going on in Myra's heart, as the words sunk deep into her soul, words that lulled her into quietude, like softest music. She did not deceive herself: she did not, and never could forget. But in looking back, she felt that, but for that other dream—that dream of her childhood and not less romantic girlhood—that ideal of her young imagination which had precluded all others—she could not have hesitated in her answer when first he had poured into her ear that passionate recital of silent endurance and ardent hopes. She had seen, she had loved, she had lost! It had been so bright, so troubled, so fleeting! But in this, there was nothing to doubt, nothing to risk, nothing to fear, only confidence, peace and rest! and she felt assured that he to whom he had been so generous while a sojourner in these beclouded regions of temporal mutability, and who now enjoyed the glory and blessedness of celestial things, could not envy this noble, unselfish spirit the mite of comfort he might extract from earthly blessings. As a child she had honored and trusted him, and with the maturer reflection of the woman, she knew that this quiet grave man had gained a hold upon her affections that time nor adversity could uproot—that his happiness was dearer to her than life—that they could have no grief, no joy apart.

She would have told him this. She tried to speak, and failing, burst into tears.

He no longer felt rebuked by her agitation. He saw in it nothing of pain, nothing of reproach; her embarrassment—something in her face—reassured him.

"It is not much that I ask—only the right to protect—the right to make you happy," he plead, with reverential tenderness.

"No, Lionel; no," mastering her emotion and speaking with an

earnestness bordering on solemnity, "not for that, but"—turning upon him a face irradiated by a deep, tranquil gladness, and laying her own in the hand he held out to her, "but because I love you!"

* * * * * * *

They have a superstition in the East, that the spirits of the departed keep watch over their own graves, unseen by mortal eyes. If true, what fervent benisons must these invisible guardians have breathed over the rapt pair, who, in the first ecstatic moments of new-found and unlooked-for happiness, feared to move or to speak, lest they should dissolve that blest union of the souls! And as Myra sat gazing, as it were, into futurity, she saw —as we have seen on a summer's sky—the reflection, more delicately tinted, but not less beauteous, of the too evanescently brilliant symbol that had spanned the welkin of happier days; and when she left B——, a few hours later, she did not go alone.

Two years have passed, and the orphan's sunny presence brightens, as in by-gone years, the ancestral halls. For it is at Violet Bank that we find her—the home of her fathers—a gift from Lionel on her marriage day. The unoccupied, but carefully preserved state in which she had found it, and which she was, at the time, unable to account for, was then explained. He had intended a glad surprise for her, and by redoubling his energies and practicing some self-denial, had been enabled to redeem her rightful inheritance, and was only awaiting her birthday, then near at hand, for its presentation, when, as he teasingly tells her, she anticipated him, by a tacit suggestion of a less disinterested and more agreeable settlement. But gratifying as is the knowledge of this additional proof of his unparalleled generosity and matchless devotion, she likes it infinitely better as it is. She never returned to Texas as she promised, and though her friends were sorry to give her up, they could not be so selfish as not to rejoice in her happiness and good fortune; and Aunt Jemima, who has been restored to her former post of dignity and responsibility, declares that she can "depart in peace," having lived to see the fulfilment of her fondest dreams. Lionel moves with a lighter step and wears a blither smile than have been his for many years, and, as the faith-

ful old domestic has remarked more than once, not without grounds, "'pears to get younger every day."

Myra is sitting alone in her favorite room, the dear cheerful, cozy old library, one fine autumn evening, indulging in the most pleasing of reveries, when stealing softly into the room, he lays a paper upon her lap, and with characteristic delicacy, quits the apartment.

Glancing at the paragraph indicated, the too common heading: "A HORRIBLE SUICIDE," and the abhorred name: "Charles H. McLyons," send the color from her lips and a shudder through her frame.

She tries to rally—tries to read through the long tedious columns, but she can not; it is too shocking. She only reads enough to learn that the world-honored homicide has taken his own life!—and that he died cursing his beautiful fiend of a wife, whom he exposed mercilessly, alleging that she was an accomplice in his crime, and no less guilty than he; inasmuch as she had led him on to vengeance, being an associate and abettor in his diabolical intrigue; that she had never cared for him, but had married him through pique; that earth was a hell, and life no longer supportable.

There was no witness, no proof against the latter, however, and this unsubstantiated accusation of an aberrant mind could have little weight in a court of justice. But the fair Circe had fallen in her own snare. Crushed by the publicity given to the charge, her vanity stung by her husband's avowed hatred, and her conscience by the remorseful throes of a guilty soul, she had fled from her idol, the world, seeking refuge in a convent, where with penance and tears she might expiate the crimes (for they can be called by no other name) of her short career.

Myra sits for some minutes shading her eyes with her hand to shut out the ghastly image which the words present, shuddering involuntarily, and wishing she had not read them, when a well-known voice says in her ear: "Myra!"

He has entered so noiselessly that she gives a slight start as she looks up.

"Myra!" he repeats softly, not wishing to break in upon her abruptly.

The hideous spectacle is driven before the sound like the chill

twilight of early dawn before the rising sun, bringing wamth and light where cold and darkness had been, feeling, as she does, that no possible ill can befall her when he is near; and out of her consternation arises a thanksgiving for her own happy lot.

Yes, Myra is contented; and why? She has grown to be a devout little optimist; and believing that all things are ordered for some grand and wise end, has learned to enjoy the blessings and accept unmurmuringly the trials that are sent upon her. The ungrateful heart has been likened to "the sand of the desert," yielding no return for the favors showered upon it: the grateful heart is like a smiling oasis, and Love the perpetual fount that keeps it fresh and green; nor can discord creep in where perfect confidence and innocence abide. Happiness, that capricious sprite, a little lower than her sister Bliss, too pure for earth, too fickle for heaven, escaped from Paradise, and doomed to wander through our sublunary vales, finding at last a home akin to her native bowers, has flitted here, and folded her weary pinions.

606

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

0002214568A